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A Descriptive Study of Focus Room as a Method of Integrating the Educationally Disadvantaged with the More Abled Student

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A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF FOCUS ROOM
AS A METHOD OF INTEGRATING THE EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED
WITH THE MORE ABLED STUDENT

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Special Education

by
Edward J. Novak
August 1970

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, the social conscience of Americans was awakened to the fact that many citizens were not receiving the education which would equip them to cope in a full and useful manner with the complexities of our society. At first on the local level, and then as part of a nationwide concern for the rights and opportunities of minority groups, a massive effort was mounted to correct this condition. Thus arose a multitude of social action programs which have been labeled "compensatory education."

NATIONAL SCENE

Compensatory programs intended, at least in part, to aid socioculturally disadvantaged children have burgeoned in the last few years. Probably the best known of these programs are VISTA and Project Head Start, conducted under the auspices of the federal government and aimed at the child of the ghetto, or inner-city schools, isolated from his more advantaged age-mates. In 1965, President Johnson called for the establishment of a National Teacher Corps of especially trained teachers to work in urban slums and areas of rural poverty. In that same year, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was established by the federal government to

strengthen school programs for the children of low income parents.

The vast majority of these compensatory educational programs deal with children who attend relatively homogenous schools in more or less isolated "poverty" areas. These efforts, to say the least, are admirable. In contrast, this program was designed to deal with educationally disadvantaged children in heterogeneous school situations.

THE PROBLEM

The problem was to develop a descriptive method of meeting the needs of underachieving students in the junior high. Focus Room was then decided upon as a method of meeting these needs by integrating the educationally disadvantaged with the more abled students.

The program, from which this study resulted, was made possible by a Title I grant from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The program was written and proposed for Lakota Junior High School, Federal Way School District, Federal Way, Washington, by the writer, the school psychologist, and the three school counselors. In the opinion of those persons, Lakota was in need of such a program for primarily two reasons: no special education program was available for this school, and the psychologist and counselors found the traditional school program was not meeting the needs of the extremes in Lakota's student body.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The general purpose of Focus Room was to attempt to establish a method of providing reparation experiences that would enable the student to evaluate and rebuild in these areas in terms of his own needs.

In an attempt to meet these needs, Focus Room was proposed by the school psychologist to operate as a specialized facility where the student could find immediate and practical solutions to eminent problems that caused concern to himself and others. The specific intent of student assignment to Focus Room was intended to be as varied and individual as the needs of the students themselves.

CATEGORIES OF DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

In the opinion of the psychologist and counselors mentioned above, it was thought that most problems would fall into four broad categories:

1. Inability to find an acceptable mode of behavior in interaction with peers and adults
2. Specific deficits in skill areas
3. A need for a standard of values as related to others
4. A deficient or distorted sense of personal adequacy.

The following characteristics were observed by the writer when working with these students during the past year:

Category 1: Inability to find an acceptable mode of behavior in interaction with peers or adults. These students are unable to gain accomplishments in the academics because they are preoccupied with what others think of them. They don't understand that when they are asked by a teacher to start an assignment that it doesn't mean "I hate you." Insecurity and fear of rejection by peers and adults constantly plague these students.

Category 2: Specific deficits in skill areas. These students, over the years, develop poor study habits, become relatively more deficient in the basic skills, see no way to get caught up or overcome their deficiencies, and eventually relieve themselves of this justified burden by leaving school. Students are generally irresponsible because they don't have sufficient academic background to at least satisfactorily complete their minimum current course requirements. Annually, this student sees failure, summer school, and very little hope.

Category 3: A need for a standard of values as they relate to others. It is most difficult for these students to succeed because they are presented with a strange conflict by the school and their classmates. At school they are confronted with an opposing standard of values. They are incapable of relating to others because of the experiences they have lived. The values their families have adopted are so irrelevant to what the school requires and what most students expect that they find the price of

of succeeding in the school situation is unbearable. As individuals they form very united groups. Alliance to the cohort supersedes all other interests. They perceive the school scene as something of much lesser importance than that in which they participate out of school. The value of education is not questioned--it is just discounted. They have very strong values or codes, but they may not be what is considered normal or socially acceptable in the eyes of the public or civil authorities.

Category 4: A deficient or distorted sense of personal adequacy. This category is frequently populated with the more able student as well as the deficient one. Quite often students will temporarily question their personal worth. But, the disadvantaged student knows he isn't competitive with or on the same plateau as his more abled peers.

The four deficiencies as outlined are very closely interrelated. If they were to be applied, however, by bits and pieces to each student appropriately, the students for which Focus Room was established were generally found to be socially incapable of performing academic operations. That is to say, these students are primarily preoccupied by their personal adequacy, image, and relationships with others. It may, however, be the contrary--the correction of an academic deficiency which removes this insecurity. It is only until after these insecurities are relieved that these students will be able to take best advantage of their capabilities.

It is evident, therefore, that these problems are complex and no attempt will be made to isolate any one or more of the four behaviors in order to categorize any individual student accordingly.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

For the purpose of this study, these terms are defined as follows:

Educationally Disadvantaged

The term educationally disadvantaged will be used to identify those students who are academically deficient resulting from social, cultural, and/or economic deprivation.

Social, Cultural, and Economic Deprivation

These terms are used by the writer to identify those students whose experiences or means have limited them in their academic progress or social adjustment as opposed to the more able student.

More Able

This term is used to describe that student whose achievement is evidenced by satisfactory grades and whose school adjustment was observed by the writer as being normal.

Focus Room

A classroom organized as a resource center catering primarily to the educationally disadvantaged and over-coming

their deficiencies. More able students were also encouraged to use this room.

At the onset of the program, the writer was selected as master teacher. Several years experience was previously gained with various special education programs exclusively at the elementary level. The master teacher was very enthusiastic about this program, especially the free-flowing method which was proposed for the students to travel in and out of their regular school classes.

One very serious reservation, however, superseded all other thoughts. It was the very nature of these disadvantaged students that qualified them to be served with Title I funds. They had come from disadvantaged environments and for years had been under-achievers. These students learned to be defensive, suspicious, and generally non-accepting. They didn't participate in school activities and were encouraged to "stay away--to keep things peaceful."

How, then, could these students be integrated into the student body and accepted as individuals--with respect and dignity? It was believed that this would not be accomplished by isolating them in a room marked "special." To reinforce their history of rejection was just exactly the opposite of what these students needed. It was from this opposite that the primary procedure of Focus Room was established: To provide the opportunity for the disadvantaged student to overcome his social and academic deficiencies

by providing constant interaction with the more able student while presenting appropriate academic material. This procedure will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

TITLE I

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, launched in 1966, under the administration of the U.S. Office of Education, has as its ultimate goal the overcoming of educational deprivation associated with poverty and race. More specifically, its objectives are not only to decrease achievement differences correlated with race and social class, but to provide medical and dental services, lunch programs, teacher training, diagnostic services, and classroom construction (8:27).

The allocation of Title I funds involves block aid to the states based on applications submitted to each state by its educational agencies.

J. Warren Leaden, Coordinator of Federal Projects, Federal Way School District, stated that the objectives of Title I programs are "to strengthen school programs for the children of low income parents, reducing the social, economic, and cultural handicaps to learning that often accompany poverty (3:2)."

Leaden's statement of objectives differs somewhat from those stated by McDill (1969) in that the former is speaking of, or applying the general Title I objectives

directly to the unique circumstances of the Federal Way School District. Within this school, there was no problem associated with minority race differences. Therefore, this particular objective as stated by McDill was irrelevant in the Focus Room program.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS

The bulk of the literature dealing with Title I and other compensatory educational programs is on inner-city or ghetto schools. These programs deal with total populations of disadvantaged students. The similarity of Focus Room and the programs reviewed was not in the physical structure or specific content, but rather in the needs and behavior of those students involved.

Although Focus Room did not have in attendance any racial minority group students, those who enabled the school to qualify for Title I funds possessed many similar character traits as those from inner-city or ghetto areas. Passow (1968) maintains that the disadvantaged are characterized by negative self-images. The negative impact of improvement of impoverishment on the ego development motivation, and personality traits of minority group children has been documented. Scholastic performance suffers from the lower self-esteem, sense of personal worth, and aspiration level of many disadvantaged children (9:7).

For many children, a cycle is created that Whiteman

describes as follows:

With early failure or difficulty in academic learning tasks, the child's self-confidence may be impaired so that learning becomes more difficult and unrewarding. The lowered achievement level may even feed back on the slower development of the originally lowered cognitive skills. A series of interactions between underlying abilities, overt achievement, and inward self-confidence may take place--lowered abilities producing lowered achievements, lowered achievements inducing diminished self-confidence, which in turn feeds back upon the achievements, and so on. If one adds the devaluations brought...on by poverty-prejudice, these processes may be accelerated. (15:65)

Warden (1968) also employs the circle to figuratively describe the plight of the disadvantaged. She, supplementing Whiteman's statement, extends her cycle beyond the immediate, maintaining there is a multiplying and lasting effect when this population is abandoned. In reference to disadvantaged backgrounds, Warden says they

...produce children who are disadvantaged in relation to others when they begin school; comparative disadvantage portends early school maladjustment that tends to become cumulative over a period of time; school maladjustment is reflected in limitations of potential and restrictions on future adult status; low status and comparative lack of education produces disadvantaged parents whose children suffer comparative disadvantage in background knowledge, experience, training, and motivation, and thus it continues from generation to generation. (14:142)

PROGRAMS

In simple terms, compensatory education is education designed to compensate, or make up for deficiencies in a person's learning experiences. McDill (1969) explains this is approached in primarily two fashions: by either modifying the behavior of the individual so that he can better

survive in the educational system or by altering the system so that it will be more successful with students having special difficulties.

Quite an extensive list of the compensatory programs in existence during the past decade could be compiled. It will, however, be the aim of the writer to identify and review some of the more notable programs on the national scene involving those students at the junior high level.

Enrichment and guidance projects are typically an aspect of larger programs designed to overcome cultural impoverishment, enhance motivation, and widen the horizons of pupils from depressed areas. The widely reported Demonstration Guidance Program in New York City had a strong emphasis on trips, cultural experiences, and heightened motivation (4:8).

The Madison Area Project in Syracuse, New York, includes systematically planned activities to promote mental health and personality development. The mental health specialists in the project set up individual programs for children who have emotional problems that interfere with learning. These specialists also conduct inservice education programs for teachers and act as leaders of group guidance classes.

Other aspects of the Madison Area Project provide an ongoing emphasis on personality development--helping students to see themselves as worthy people, valuable to society. Floor-to-ceiling bulletin boards are used to

display student work, photographs of students in action, and inspirational material about successful people. Closed circuit television is also used as an instructional tool to promote poise and ego development (4:8).

Camping experiences are a part of the Detroit Great Cities Project. Goldberg (1963) claims teachers need a total awareness and understanding of the students. In this program it was found that camping can open up an entirely new dimension of experiences for an underprivileged student and may provide a unique opportunity for teachers and pupils to know and understand each other. Many bus trips are also used to enrich and expand students' experiences beyond the traditional school environment. For most, this was the only opportunity they had to travel far beyond the local neighborhood. This type of program appears to be successful and also to be gaining in popularity among many groups across the nation (4:8).

At Mobilization for Youth, a delinquency control project on New York's East Side, two programs make use of non-professional teachers trained and supervised by school personnel (4:9).

An example of students helping students is the Homework Helper Program. It is designed to serve two populations--both elementary and secondary. The secondary students provide after school tutorial help to elementary school children under the training and supervision of master teachers. The program enables adolescents to engage in

highly purposeful, constructive activity on behalf of children who can benefit from the extra attention. It offers individual assistance to elementary school pupils in need of help with basic skills, especially reading, and brings them into association with useful adolescent models who might enhance their own aspirations for success at school. At the same time, it is designed to encourage and help underprivileged secondary school students to remain in school by paying them for their services, motivating them toward improving academic achievement, and providing them with an experience which might lead to the choice of teaching as a career. An evaluation of this program showed that children who were tutored four hours a week made significantly greater gains in reading than a matched group who did not receive any tutoring.

The second Mobilization for Youth program is called Supplementary Teaching Assistance in Reading. The program is designed to provide parents in a depressed area with the tools and techniques to tutor their children in reading at home. Trained reading specialists have developed the strategies for training parents to assume this responsibility. Like the Homework Helper Program, the potential success of this kind of out of school service depends largely on the nonprofessional. These are housewives who are trained to go into the home to assist parents in helping their children. The success of the program banks heavily on the hypothesis that non-professionals can compensate in devotion and in

enthusiasm for what they lack in teaching skill (Posner, 1968).

STAFF

Throughout every description of a program for the education of disadvantaged children runs one continuous theme--the importance of the teacher (4:16).

According to Warden, research evidence has suggested that teachers' responses to high status children differ from their responses to those with low status, in that they are more likely to negatively evaluate those children they perceive as being of low status. She maintains that rewards in the formal academic system are differentially distributed. Students, she says, receiving the greatest teacher approval are those who "(1) are most intelligent, (2) show the highest academic achievement, and (3) have the best over-all personality adjustment. Disadvantaged children typically receive fewer rewards in the formal system" (14:174).

Gertrude Downing, speaking from her experience with the junior high schools in New York City, and the many thousands of children who live outside the cultural mainstream, finds, "there is urgent need for teachers who are competent, creative, adaptable, sympathetic and emotionally secure, and who can feel a strong commitment to the urgent work at hand" (2:235).

Miriam Goldberg places primary emphasis on the affective qualities of the successful teacher of disadvan-

taged pupils. She writes:

The successful teacher of disadvantaged children respects his pupils...because he sees them...quite realistically as different from his children and his neighbors' children, yet like all children coping in their own way with the trials and frustrations of growing up. And he sees them, unlike middleclass children, struggling to survive in the ruthless world of their peers, confused by the conflicting demands of the two cultures in which they live--the one of the home and the street and the neighborhood, the other of the school and the society that maintains it.

He understands the backgrounds from which the children come, the values placed on various achievements, the kind of work and life to which they aspire. He recognizes and understands the reasons for their unwillingness to strive toward future goals, where such efforts provide little reward in the present.

...is aware of the various family structures from which the children come:...no father present;...two parents, but both are working; where one or both parents are able-bodied but out of work, recipients of relief; where the father is disabled...mother works; where an extended family...(many relatives) live together. This teacher has seen the physical conditions in which the children live: their lack of privacy...facilities...basic needs...support...parental aspirations...identity figures.

In addition to his knowledge about the history of the child in his environment, the successful teacher has a sophisticated understanding of how a child's abilities are assessed and therefore a realistic perception of what these measurements describe and predict.

The successful teacher meets the child on equal terms, as person to person, individual to individual.... he accepts, he doesn't condone. He sets clearly defined limits...fixes the boundaries, and establishes the routines with a minimum of discussion. Within these boundaries the teacher is businesslike and orderly, knowing that he is there to do a job. But he is also warm and outgoing, adapting his behavior to the individual pupils in his class.

He lets each pupil know that he expects more than the pupil thinks he can produce--but his standards are not so high as to become too remote to strive toward. He rewards each tiny step, alert to every opportunity for honest praise, and, if possible, withholds harsh criticism (5:104).

The writer has found that any success resulting from compensatory education programs lies primarily with the teacher--professional or nonprofessional. The teacher must be aware of the background from which the disadvantaged student comes, as in the successful Homework Helpers Program. Or, the teacher must become aware of the philosophies and background of the disadvantaged student, as in the Madison Area Project in Syracuse or the Detroit Great Cities Project.

PEERS

That the peer group is the most common social reference group for school-age youngsters is a well documented fact (14:94).

Only one study will be cited here for illustrative purposes, because its findings are typical of many such studies. Much of the research on the impact of the peer group has been done with adolescent subjects. Sutton has conducted research using the Syracuse Scale of Social Relations, supplemented by socialization records kept by teachers. His results show that children tend to select their peers as sources of help, for both social and academic goals, more frequently than either teachers or parents (13:30).

Riessman agrees with this idea and maintains that the "helper principle" may be especially valuable for disadvantaged youngsters because in their informal out-of-school learning they tend to learn much more from each other, from

their brothers and sisters, than from having their parents read them a book or answer their questions. "They are," Riessman states, "essentially peer learners by style and experience" (11:84).

HETEROGENEOUS GROUPING

By junior high, and certainly by high school, Warden believes that programs aimed at academically and socially integrating the disadvantaged student are extremely difficult to devise, if not doomed to failure. They are doomed not because his personality is permanently formed and "not amendable to change," but because the "Leftout" (as she refers to the disadvantaged student) has by this time so radically altered his goals, self-concept, and reference group identification that only with extreme difficulty and great patience combined with many rewarding experiences "can he possibly be induced to revive the goals and interests with which he has entered the social subsystem of the heterogeneous school" (14:11).

Heterogeneous grouping, or integrating the disadvantaged, even if it is as difficult as Warden maintains, is increasing--because of popular demand, for moral reasons, and by experience of favorable results. Even in such cities as New York, where homogeneous grouping has long been the general practice, heterogeneous grouping has become a very attractive feature in the More Effective Schools program (4:4).

It has been suggested that potentially the heterogeneous school situation is an important avenue for social tolerance, understanding and acceptance on the part of the more advantaged student, in addition to serving to facilitate upward social mobility for the disadvantaged student. Evidence also strongly suggests that a heterogeneous school situation, with a value climate of achievement orientation, is the best one for fostering acculturation and social assimilation (14:132).

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Possibly the most widely acclaimed reviews of compensatory education are those of Gordon and Wilkerson. They observe in their critique of compensatory programs that the majority of such programs could be described as "successful" if the criterion for judgment is the enthusiasm of those initiating such efforts. But, they argue, "something more than enthusiasm is needed, and valid assessment studies are all too scarce" (6:31).

McDill contends that current programs in compensatory education are handicapped by the vagueness with which each of their objectives is specified. Everyone can agree on the objective of establishing a program which will make it easier for children to adjust successfully to regular school settings or to achieve within the traditional classroom scholastic performance consistently higher than is now obtained. The great problem is, he emphatically states,

"when one is actually trying to evaluate the effectiveness of a compensatory program, one finds it imperative that goals be specific enough to permit measurement. It is this which is truly difficult" (8:46).

Goldberg details some of the many problems in sound evaluation and the many "blocks which must be removed if educators are to collect the data needed to justify expenditures on programs for the disadvantaged." Seven problems are presented by Goldberg:

1. The pressure for "solutions which threatens careful, objective evaluation
2. Evaluation performed as an afterthought without prior criteria and valid pre- and post- data
3. Fuzziness in formulating objectives and determining significant content
4. The failure to design assessment and strategies fit for varying populations
5. The unwillingness of educators to combine populations and programs in developing the larger research design needed for cross-community evaluation
6. The reluctance to distinguish between short-term and long-term outcomes
7. The failure to develop and implement longitudinal programs, and to support the need for such programs

Dr. Goldberg is especially adamant in advising program planners and proposal developers to "think of evaluation and assessment from the start" (5:240-248).

As Assistant Commissioner in charge of Title I programs, Goff describes these programs as having the unusual feature of the built-in evaluation design. She states, however, "the snags that have developed in the evaluation of Title I projects indicate a need for a great deal more sophistication, research-based confidence, and general know-how than most are able to provide" (9:75).

McDill concludes with a comment which appears to be the general consensus of those concerned with assessing the structure of, and benefits resulting from compensatory education programs. He states that, "although compensatory programs continue to be focused on the affective or socio-emotional development..., in assessing them one is still required to accept subjective evaluations because rigorous measuring instruments are lacking" (8:12).

Chapter 3

FACILITY AND PROCEDURE

The physical appearance of the Focus Room endeavored to maintain an environment not associated with a traditional classroom. The procedure for student entry to Focus Room was kept as simple as was thought possible to be practical.

FACILITY

Physical Structure and Furnishings

The Focus Room was located in the center of the building near the reading center and library. The size of the room was half-again as large as the size of a regular classroom.

Within the confines of the room, there were several separate areas divided by folding screens. The lounge area, by far the most popular, was furnished with an area rug surrounded by three couches and an over-stuffed chair. On the rug was a coffee table and nearby was a bookshelf containing current periodicals. A refrigerator was also located in this area. Six magazine subscriptions were received ranging from fashions for girls to mechanics for boys.

Two round tables for group activities and three study carrels were located in another area of the room. A work area in the rear of the room near the sink was found

to be valuable in terms of meeting the needs of the students who found therapy in working with their hands. And, in the front of the room near the chalk board were located eight student desks for group instruction.

One tape recorder and six portable listening cassettes were in the Focus Room for student use. Students were permitted to take the listening cassettes home with them for additional study. This consisted of key lectures by regular classroom teachers, mathematics drill activities, and the recording of portions of textbooks by advanced students or community volunteers.

Focus Room Staff

The Focus Room was staffed with one master teacher. Other teachers in the building found it rewarding to occasionally volunteer their services during part of their planning period for individual instruction. At times, these teachers would call a particular student out of class to offer immediate aid in a deficient area. Persons in the community were encouraged to volunteer their services. The master teacher coordinated the services of both the professional and lay volunteer personnel.

In the proposal it was stated that the master teacher should have a counseling background and experience with troubled or handicapped children since remediation was believed to be inexorably bound to emotional acceptance and trust. And also that this teacher be well versed and adept

in teaching elementary skill subjects since many of the deficit areas involved such problems.

It was also stated in the proposal that a teacher in this situation be a mature disciplinarian and an expert in demonstrating both firmness and flexibility in classroom organization. Good personal organization was a prerequisite in staff selection. It was thought that many problems of scheduling dissimilar activities in meeting the needs individually and collectively of assigned students would be ever-present in the Focus Room. It was required that the master teacher be knowledgeable in the skills required to set goals, prescribe suitable learning experiences, and methods of evaluation. It was believed necessary that he have at least three years previous experience and desirable that these be in the elementary classroom, and that a Master's Degree or comparable experience or training be held.

It was found by the building administrators that the roll of the teacher was paramount. This person was the focal point in coordinating all efforts of this project and the overall school program. During the junior high years identification is one of the difficult processes that students face. So the student deficient in social or academic areas could be more successful in the total school program, the Focus Room provided an interrelating adult whose image was an example not otherwise available.

PROCEDURE

Focus Room Program

The program operated on an island security concept. It existed as an assurance of individual assistance within the milieu of the demands of the school. It was considered a specialized facility in which rehabilitation and change could occur on a short-term basis. Restorative and stimulating experiences were structured according to prescription.

The length of time students were assigned to Focus Room ranged from as little as part of an hour to the better part of a day, from one day to a month. Since only short-term goals were established for each student, no student remained longer than a month without reevaluation and reassignment. Attempts were made to minimize the amount of time spent by the student in Focus Room. It was believed that for those students who would seem to require full-time placement, they should be carefully evaluated and if their problems were of such a global nature that they be recommended for Special Education at another location in the district. It was found, however, that the population of Lakota contained no students in this latter category.

For students with similar problems, attempts were made to schedule them to Focus Room for the same class period. At any given time, however, several different, but concordant activities were in session. Individual and group instruction, counseling, group processes, remediation, or

retreat, depending on the needs of the students, were part of the daily scheduling. Focus Room was maintained as a totally flexible program, serving as few as four students or as many as thirty-five at any given time.

Time spent in the Focus Room by students supplanted rather than supplemented regular class time missed. Students were not held responsible for assignments missed in their regular classroom during their legitimate placement in Focus Room.

Group dynamics sessions, revolving around problems of mutual interest and need, were held when necessary. These were conducted by one of the counselors or the master teacher. The structure was such that the upset student could have freedom to move around, chat, or work on a hobby while others completed assigned activities.

The opportunity was made available and the more able students were encouraged to pursue projects of current interest to them in the Focus Room. The room was always open during the student lunch periods for those who preferred to eat their lunch in a less stimulating atmosphere than the cafeteria.

Operational Procedures

The program functioned under the supervision of the principal. Counselors and the Focus Room teacher regulated the flow of students in and out of the program. The program operated on the same rotating schedule as the rest of the school. The Focus Room teacher had a planning period as did

the other teachers in the building. It was found, however, to be necessary for the Focus Room teacher to rotate his planning period on a monthly basis in order to accommodate the classroom teachers. The planning period was utilized for the preparation of individual student materials, communicating with other staff, and home instruction.

Entry to the Program

The permanent assignment of students for a particular period--from two days to a month--was done through the counselors. In some instances, however, when the student's counselor was not immediately available, the student was allowed to refer himself. In most cases, prior to the permanent assignment, plans were made with the student, the Focus Room teacher, the classroom teacher, and the counselor so that all had an understanding of the referring problem, the plan of action, and the time sequence.

Ingress and egress were kept as simple and casual as possible. Minimal forms were filled out with the counselor for evaluative purposes. A five-by-eight index card kept for each student served two functions: a composite record of background information and individual student goals, and a record for attendance purposes (see Figure 1). Students who made unscheduled visits kept their own records--motivated by spot-checks by the teacher from whose class they had come (see Figure 2).

Name		Period	Entrance Date
Teacher	Grade	Subject	Departure Date
Referral Personnel			
Objective (Reason for referral.)			
Plan of Action			
Follow-up conference			

Figure 1

Record Card for Permanently Assigned Students

DAY _____ DATE ___/___/___

Name	Period	Who Sent You	From What Class	Time In / Out	Reason

Figure 2

Unscheduled Visit Record Sheet

Academic Procedures

All academics performed in the Focus Room were directed at correcting deficiencies occurring as a result of the student's inability to progress through the sequential course material of the regular classroom.

Academic problems were found by the writer to be of two kinds. First, there was the student who required remedial activities to relearn necessary skills. Examples of this might be the multiplication facts or punctuation rules. Secondly, there were those who needed additional approaches to supplement those offered in the classroom in order to comprehend the initial presentation of new concepts. Examples in this case might be the proof of geometrical theorems or understanding the process of photosynthesis.

The student's work was always returned to the classroom teacher as an aid in the continual student assessment process resulting in the required grade, which was the responsibility of the teacher from whose class the student was assigned.

Specialized materials were most often constructed by the master teacher rather than purchasing commercially prepared materials. This was done for primarily two reasons: it was discovered that students seldom needed to utilize an entire program and only partial use of such materials was found to be quite uneconomical.

Student Evaluation

Evaluation was of two kinds: formal-objective and informal-subjective. Emphasis varied depending on the nature of the problem.

Students assigned to the Focus Room for academic reasons would return to the regular class after the master teacher informally concluded that they had overcome the particular deficiency. Objective tests were then administered by the students' regular teacher upon their return to class. The test was always part of the sequential course material. The student was then graded on the same curve, or standards, as his classmates.

Assignment of students to the Focus Room for social reasons resulted in somewhat a different evaluation. These problems of a behavioral nature were less easy to evaluate in terms of progress and/or complete rehabilitation. The student's self evaluation was an important factor at this point. After the Focus Room teacher and the student informally decided he was ready to return to class, a conference was called again involving both teachers, the student, and his counselor.

At the time the student returned to class, his teacher was informed of the successful teaching techniques and methods used in the Focus Room. Sometime during the third week after his return, a follow-up conference was held with the same personnel as were involved in the last conference.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Focus Room attempted to provide services for primarily two groups of students: those who were academically or socially deficient--educationally disadvantaged, and those who may have needed some aid beyond that which is normally offered in the regular classroom.

EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED

During the course of the second and third quarters of the school year, 64 students were placed in the Focus Room because they were doing failing work in their regular class or they were socially incapable of performing academic requirements. Having returned to their regular classes, their average grade earned from the class teacher at the end of the third quarter was 1.33, or D+, ranging from F to B.

It was found that each student must be approached as an individual, always on the assumption that with guidance and individually appropriate academic instruction presented in the correct environment, he would progress beyond his present level of performance.

MORE ABLE STUDENTS

Focus Room was also available to any student who requested on his own to use its services. Out of a student body of 940, 545 made 9,996 unscheduled visits to the Focus Room during the school year. This represents approximately 14 students per period in addition to the educationally disadvantaged mentioned above.

Students not scheduled for Focus Room were always required to report to their class teacher before spending a period or part of a period in the Focus Room. These students were then dismissed back to their regular class several minutes before the end of the period. This was found to be necessary for two reasons: assurance that the student did spend the period in the Focus Room, and the class teacher was then able to review the accomplishments, if any, that were made.

If numbers are any indication, the writer has concluded that students are eager to learn in independent, inquiry situations. This was evidenced by the fact that nearly 10,000 visits were accumulated by 540 students.

Focus Room was completely unstructured. This rather large number of students were there voluntarily to complete assignments or pursue special interests. They received a very limited amount of instruction. If it was necessary, it was very informal and dealt with the problem at hand. They weren't presented an entire lesson to then only be able to

apply part of it to their individual approach to an assignment. What was needed, was taught. It was relevant.

It was found by the writer that as the year progressed, the number of visits by the more able students increased. The building administration and teaching staff often expressed their satisfaction with the program. Students often reported teacher praise for accomplishments achieved in the Focus Room. This was encouraging to students and promoted additional independent study and inquiry learning.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was found that the more able student most readily seeks advice in areas of social adjustment, thereby eliminating a more serious problem. Imitation is one way by which the deficient student learns. As he sees the "good" student questioning and becoming frustrated, and after this "good" student discusses his problems with the teacher resulting in a plan which will solve them, the deficient student sees a process which he himself can use to solve his own difficulties. The realization that the more able student has difficulties also, makes the deficient student realize problems are normal and so are solutions which help develop healthy attitudes toward self and school.

Enough credit cannot be given to this group of more able students. The apparent success of this program is attributed to them. It was because of their presence that no stigma was attached to the Focus Room. The students with academic deficiencies were able to study at their own level, at their own rate, and with peace of mind because there were no labels of "good" or "bad" affixed to any individual.

Many group projects were arranged to involve a disadvantaged student with those who were more able. Very

favorable outcomes from these situations were seen by both the Focus Room and classroom teachers. To learn, to be a contributing member of a winning team, to be part of an assignment that earned a good grade, and to experience success was extremely gratifying for the disadvantaged student. Experiencing success, the acquisition of skills, and time were found by the writer to be as mandatory as three sides are to a triangle in producing independence in learning.

When a teacher of the disadvantaged enters the classroom, a very special personal philosophy must be paramount. The writer has concluded by experience and observation that this philosophy must begin with "The student..."

By definition, the teacher must remember that the disadvantaged student does not have a wide range of experiences from which he can draw, or to which he can relate. The writer has found that learning can most nearly be equated to relating. Presentation of needed subject matter often-times is a lengthy operation. It may have to be preceded by experiences to which the student can later relate the necessary subject matter. The setting, which includes the necessity for learning, and the presentation are of prime importance.

An analysis of the deficiencies of those who used the services offered in the Focus Room, generated some surprise to the writer. These deficiencies occurred in a sizeable percentage of the students, and by no means limited

to the disadvantaged. Having previously taught for five years at various levels in the elementary school, the writer questions the reason for these observations knowing that such subject matter was more than once part of the student's elementary school curriculum.

Several questions are posed, and would be worthy of further research: Is teaching being done to a select group, rather than individuals? Why is subject matter to which students are being exposed several times, not being retained? Is the teaching process being conducted in a manner which promotes independent utilization of acquired knowledge?

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