

### CHAPTER III

## WHAT THE WAR HAS TAUGHT US ABOUT ADULT EDUCATION

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No time in history has witnessed so great a practical application of sound educational principles as has occurred during the period since the United States entered World War II. Maximum production in the shortest time possible became the goal of almost every educational enterprise. This emphasis on efficiency did not, however, limit the scope of the Army's educational efforts. From the start education was considered the "backbone of the Army," as General Brehon B. Somervell observed: "We can lose this war on the battlefield, as a direct result of losing it on the educational front. Education is the backbone of an Army."

The demands for educational programs were numerous and varied. The Army provided a specialized training program to meet the need for men skilled in medicine, engineering, science, mathematics, and psychology. The Army could not afford an interruption in the flow of professionally and technically trained men. Hence, it was decided to experiment with the Army Specialized Training Program to guarantee the steady flow of trained men during the ensuing period of the war. Although the Army Specialized Training Program was later abandoned, it is interesting to note that when the program was initiated it was requested that (1) abundant use be made of visual aids, (2) demonstration exercises be organized, (3) reviews be frequent, (4) testing be periodic, and

(5) ample opportunities be provided for applying acquired information or skills. In this program, as in most Army training, emphasis was placed upon the function or use of acquisitions and skills, and careful steps were taken to insure maximum efficiency throughout the training cycle. This concern for instructional efficiency was necessary since the unparalleled and immediate demand for specialists placed a heavy burden upon the Army.

There are more than 150 Army jobs which necessitate a knowledge of electricity; about 200 require an understanding of machines; and more than 175, a knowledge of shopwork. To fulfill the needs within the armed forces, it was necessary to train unprecedented numbers of men with extreme speed.

The Army's program has been characterized by intensity of effort and by long hours of continuous training, by definite and limited goals of achievement, and by careful direction, guidance, and measurement of progress. Moreover, an efficient system of classification has been used in the assignment of men to fields of endeavor for which they are well suited because of their ability or their aptitude. The Army's success in training the vast numbers of men needed as occupational or military specialists suggests a potentiality in young people which is frequently overlooked or neglected. Another dramatic demonstration of the potentiality of the masses for

learning is found in the successful operation of Special Training Units within the Army.

#### INSTRUCTION OF ILLITERATE AND NON-ENGLISH-SPEAKING MEN

In order to satisfy the need for manpower in the armed forces, it became necessary to induct large numbers of illiterate and non-English-speaking men. Special Training Units were organized to give these men the academic training they needed to become useful soldiers. The fourth-grade level in reading and related subjects was the standard believed to be essential. Because of the existence of very large numbers of adults who in America have completed less than four years of elementary education, the Army found it necessary to accept such men and teach the three R's.<sup>1</sup> By applying established principles of education, the Army succeeded in developing an amazingly efficient program of education—a program which has enabled the average illiterate or non-English-speaking man to acquire the basic academic skills needed in Army life in eight weeks' time. Some men finish the program in three or four weeks; a few men—mostly non-English-speaking—are retained thirteen or even sixteen weeks in exceptional cases. Most of them require only eight weeks to do so. The statistics on the reception centers where the Special Training Units are operated show that more than 90 per cent of the men succeed in reaching acceptable standards.

<sup>1</sup> In one survey, it was found that about one-seventh, or 13.5 per cent, of young people and adults might be considered functionally illiterate since their education had not extended beyond the fourth grade. In Louisiana, Georgia, and Mississippi, the percentages were 30 or higher.

#### ORIGIN OF SPECIAL TRAINING UNIT MEN

Most of the men assigned to the Special Training Units come from sections of the country where schools are inadequate. Some of these men have lived in mountainous or rural districts where schools are inaccessible during several months of the year and poor at all times. Others come from the border and coast states, where immigrants sometimes form independent groups that manage to get along by using a very limited amount of English. And some come from the foreign colonies of our great cities. In one unit in Texas 95 per cent of the trainees are non-English-speaking men of Spanish or Mexican background. But there are trainees from other parts of the country—communities where educational opportunities are good or even excellent. Some of these men have been faced with family needs which have made them leave school at an early age. Still others have learned little during their years in school.

Tests are employed to classify the men in one of four groups at the beginning of the training cycle. Critical scores show whether the trainee can be expected to succeed at the most elementary level or whether he will be able to follow the work prescribed at more advanced levels. If a trainee starts at the first level, he will ordinarily finish the program in eight weeks. If he enters the third section, only four weeks will be required to complete the course. Every student must be able to reach critical scores on tests of reading, arithmetic, and language ability before leaving a unit.

Men who fail to make acceptable scores are separated honorably from the service and returned to civilian life.

Typically these men in the Special Training Units are eager to learn. Experience has shown the disadvantage of being unable to read; they want to overcome their handicaps, and they welcome their new opportunities. "More than anything else, I want to learn to read," said one man. When asked why, he summarized rather fully his reasons as well as those of many of his comrades: "I want to be able to read letters from home. And I want to know what's going on in other places." Finally, he added, "I want to be able to read the things the other fellows do."

#### THE USE OF FUNCTIONAL METHODS AND MATERIALS

The success of this program may be attributed in part to the methods and instructional materials employed by the Army.<sup>2</sup> Of significance is the fact that both materials and methods are functional. Accordingly, all subject matter is presented in the form in which it will be most readily and most frequently used. The *Army Reader* and the *Army Arithmetic*, textbooks for developing basic skills, deal with life in camp; taking care of the barracks, making purchases at the PX, keeping a budget, why we are fighting this war, etc. Film strips and other visual aids provide additional functionally useful information; for example, they show the men how uni-

form should be worn, when and how to salute, what to do in the case of air or chemical attack, and how to fire a rifle. Film strips are used also to present the simple sight and speaking vocabulary which the men need in camp. The film strip *The Story of Private Pete* introduces the most frequently used nouns, while another film strip, *Introduction to Language*, presents verbs and prepositions. These film strips serve a readiness function. They supply the soldier with a basic stock of sight words which enable him to begin his work in the *Army Reader* with success and confidence.

Supplementary reading materials offer the men additional reading experience of direct usefulness. For example, one bulletin—*Your Job in the Army*—tells the men about the various kinds of jobs they may enter when they have completed basic training. A monthly magazine, *Our War*, and a weekly *Newsmap* (special edition for these men) provide additional information; these periodicals keep the men up to date on the progress of the war and also give them some understanding concerning its background and its cause. In addition, these periodicals contain accounts of some outstanding leaders on the fighting front and at home. Occasional articles in *Our War* tell what the folks back home are doing and present descriptions of events of interest to the soldier. Both periodicals are profusely illustrated with pictures, charts, maps, and diagrams to assure understanding and stimulate interest. Not the least important of these items is a comic cartoon strip which appears in every issue of *Our War*. Other supple-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Articles in *The English Journal*, March 1945, and in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* during 1943-1944. Cf. also several accounts written in collaboration with Captain Samuel Goldberg in the latter journal.

mentary reading materials are issued monthly; some of these describe heroes of the war, while others tell the contribution of each of the United Nations. These materials are written in very simple English. Their average difficulty is about that of the typical third-grade book.

All the work in the Special Training Units is related. Thus the men may study the cost of their insurance and make entries in their budgets of this item. Letters are written home explaining this practice. In turn, letters are received and sometimes read in class. On the drill field, too, there is a concern for direct and clear use of English in the giving and time of directions and commands. Moreover, since the teacher of the academic subjects also teaches the military subjects, there is an unusual opportunity to see that the language acquisitions are applied and fostered. According to the Mobilization Training Program for Special Training Units, three or four hours per day are given over to reading, writing, and arithmetic. An additional four hours or more are devoted daily to military training. The military subjects are presented with a concern for clear communication and understanding. Specialized vocabularies are studied in subjects such as sanitation and hygiene, military discipline and courtesy, and rifle marksmanship. Clarity is enhanced further through the use of appropriate visual aids, such as film strips, films, and graphic portfolios. Even on the drill field, careful attention is directed to the giving and timing of commands. The entire program is one in which the acquisition of language skills is at all times a living, vital concern.

The maximum effectiveness of the instructional materials is assured by using them in classes which seldom exceed eighteen in size. The average class contains twelve to fifteen men. In classes of this size it is possible to encourage every man to take part in activities involving oral and written expression. In this way errors and faulty habits can be corrected at the outset and guidance and encouragement can be offered according to the varied needs within every group.

#### THE RÔLE OF THE TEACHER

The teachers in the Special Training Units are enlisted men.<sup>3</sup> Most of them have had considerable professional and academic training, and some have had experience in teaching. Comparatively few, however, have had specific training or experience in teaching adult illiterates. The materials already mentioned, as well as teachers' manuals and suggestions for the presentation of specific subjects, are provided for them. However, these teachers adapt and extend the materials.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the teachers is found in the attitude they bring to their work. They emphasize success and steady progress; they expect every man to learn effectively and rapidly. This attitude spreads to the students, who come to believe in their ability to learn. Thus, the cycle begins and continues; success brings confidence, and confidence brings success.

After a short period of training the men begin to turn to their teachers for help in meeting personal problems of many kinds. And they find the same

<sup>3</sup> It was not until recently that civilians were used as instructors in academic work.

willingness to help in these matters as that which they encounter in the academic field. At first, some of the men exhibit personality problems which make it difficult for them to adjust to Army life. The most serious problems are turned over to the personal consultants assigned to the units. But many problems are handled by the teachers themselves. Some men find it possible to alleviate anxieties and minor grievances simply by discussing these problems. Others need friendly counsel. Many trainees increase in self-confidence and self-respect as they succeed in developing skill in reading and writing and thus remove handicaps which had influenced their attitude and behavior for many years.

Two other factors certainly contribute to the effectiveness of the program as well as to the general well-being of the men. The Special Training Unit offers many of these men a better environment from the standpoint of health and hygiene than they have ever known. For the first time in their lives, many of these men are experiencing a secure, well-ordered kind of life. These factors contribute to their adjustment and to their ability to make rapid progress in learning.

#### SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

The program of special training has certainly shown that the mass of American youths are educable. Moreover, it has shown that illiteracy need not continue as a great social problem in America. In addition, it has demonstrated certain principles of significance to every teacher.

*First*, Army education has demonstrated the validity of employing functional methods and materials of in-

struction. For example, under this approach, illiterate and non-English-speaking men have been able to acquire the literacy skills needed by the soldier in the astonishingly short period of eight weeks. Moreover, the salvage rate in these units has advanced progressively with the development and use of functional materials.

*Second*, the Army program has revealed the value of visual aids in accelerating the learning process. Extensive use has been made of films, film strips, graphic portfolios, and other visual aids. It is difficult to state just how much these aids have heightened the efficiency of instruction. Their value is, however, undeniably great.

*Third*, again and again Army education has shown the importance of strong interest and motive in fostering learning. For example, illiterate men in the Army welcome an opportunity to learn the three R's in order that they may read and write letters, keep informed about what is taking place on the fighting fronts, and enjoy reading the materials available to their comrades. These motives have been fully taken into account in the preparation of instructional materials.

*Fourth*, the Army program has demonstrated the value of clear objectives and specific purposes. In special training units, as in all other Army programs, the objectives in every subject are clearly defined and stated. Steps in their attainment are outlined, and tests are used to check progress at regular intervals.

*Fifth*, the Army program has shown the advantage of relating and correlating educational activities. Instructors in the Special Training Units teach

both military and academic subjects and attempt to present all training materials in such a way that understanding will be clear and unimpaired. The use of special vocabularies, presented through appropriate visual aids, has proved an effective means of relating military and academic subjects.

*Sixth*, many different training programs have demonstrated the value of small classes and the need for adequate instructional materials for all students. The average class in the Special Training Unit contains only twelve to fifteen men. Classrooms are equipped for the use of appropriate instructional aids, and the necessary books and materials are issued to every man.

*Seventh*, the use of supplementary materials has proved one important means of applying academic skills. The Special Training Units issue a weekly newspaper and a monthly magazine to every man. The content of these publications never exceeds the fourth-grade level of difficulty.

*Eighth*, two methods of instruction, regarded as appropriate for all training activities, are widely followed in

the Special Training Units. *Demonstrations* are frequently given by instructors, and trainees engage in *applicatory exercises* to show that they can perform every step in an essential operation.

*Ninth*, the Army training program has demonstrated the potentiality of the masses for learning. Negro, Spanish-speaking, and other minority groups have performed fully as well as native whites in the Special Training Units. On standard tests and in other ways, they have demonstrated their ability.

The results of the Army program attest to the value of soundly conceived programs of education. They serve as a great challenge to every American citizen. The Army has demonstrated that illiteracy need not continue to be a great social problem in America. The way to correct the condition has been indicated. The question now is: Will we maintain the social consciousness we have developed in time of war and later offer every understanding American his rightful heritage—a chance to acquire the education needed by the useful, happy participant in a democracy?