

PARTNERSHIPS PAY OFF AND AID DISADVANTAGED

*community groups in Tennessee
meet to share concerns for
job-oriented education*

Throughout the country, community leaders are looking toward new and more effective programs of job training and education for the disadvantaged as means of breaking the vicious circle of circumstances which maintain poverty. The emphasis on the disadvantaged in the 1968 Amendments to the Vocational Education Act attests to this fact. So do the hard-core hiring and training activities of the National Alliance of Businessmen, the Manpower Administration of the Department of Labor and various other agencies.

With public attention focused on job-oriented education (basic education coupled with job orientation and skills training) the time has been ripe during the past year to encourage closer cooperation between all segments of the community concerned with the problem of making such education available and relevant for the target population. In most communities, schools have carried on their traditional vocational education classes, industry has put together its own hard-core training programs and other community agencies have pursued their own activities for the disadvantaged — all with little communication between sectors and even less coordination of efforts.

An indication of the gap between these groups is revealed in this comment from a businessman, "Vocational education is still turning out buggywhip makers. School people don't understand the requirements of today's job market." And the educator replies, "How can we meet industry's needs when they won't take the initiative and tell us what they want?"

INTERPRETIVE STUDY

To provide some basis for bringing together the various community groups sharing an interest in job-oriented education, the U.S. Office of Education, in cooperation with the Occupational Research and Development Coordinating Unit at the University of Tennessee, undertook an interpretive study of current literature and program developments in the area of job training and education

for the disadvantaged.

The study incorporated an investigation of (1) the characteristics that handicap disadvantaged persons in finding and keeping jobs and (2) current federal and private programs designed to alleviate some of these handicaps. Data included results of a national survey of 64 exemplary programs of job-oriented education sponsored jointly by private industry and the public schools.

Finally, a trial dissemination effort was added which brought together businessmen, educators and representatives of other concerned agencies within a selected urban community for a seminar program based on information gathered in the initial phase.

Guidance for conduct of a one-day trial seminar in Knoxville, Tennessee, home base for the project, was provided by an advisory group of 15 leading businessmen, school administrators and heads of community agencies such as the Urban League and Community Action Committee. These advisors recommended that letters of invitation be sent to company presidents, top school administrators and community agency directors to assure that the seminar audience would include individuals with the authority to commit their organizations to action.

SEMINAR FORMAT

The morning seminar sessions were devoted to problems associated with employing and training the disadvantaged, and the afternoon sessions to possible solutions. Responsibility for posing problems in the two morning sessions was assigned to a panel of businessmen to be followed by the Director of the Knoxville Urban League and the Director of the Knoxville Community Action Committee. In the afternoon, job-oriented education for the disadvantaged in Knoxville schools and community agencies were to be described. Then the audience would hear a panel from understanding industry-school partnerships. A look at suggested implications of the day's proceedings would conclude the seminar.

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The panel of local businessmen came from the primary employers in Knoxville: manufacturing, wholesale and retail merchandising and the service industries. The first spokesman pointed out, "We haven't really done much in employing the so-called disadvantaged because, in Knoxville, we have no trouble hiring qualified people for most entry jobs. Sometimes I wonder if the unemployed really want to work anyway, because so few respond to the ads we put in the newspapers and on the radio."

A second panel member voiced the common concern of employers over hiring standards, "When we *can* get these people into the personnel office, they don't look very good on the applications. Few meet the high school diploma requirement. They have little, if any, experience, and many who *have* been employed haven't stayed with one company for long. Hiring such people will mean lowering our hiring standards."

"Revising employment requirements is just the first exception that will have to be made for the disadvantaged," asserted a third panel member. "They speak another language. So our people have trouble communicating with them. They come in late, or don't show up at all and then we find out they've been in jail or involved in some other serious difficulty. You can't help feeling sorry for them, but we can't afford to make too many special allowances for employees without cutting into our profits."

MORE THAN TRAINING

The other businessmen agreed that taking on the hard-to-employ involves more than just job training. Individualized attention from supervisors sensitized to their problems is essential if they are to understand job performance standards and be motivated to meet them. Transportation to the job is difficult for some. For others, neglected health problems interfere with performance. And many disadvantaged add to their difficulties by displaying hostility toward their supervisor which stems from deep-seated feelings of powerlessness and re-

sentment of authority. All panel members expressed concern that special consideration and leniency shown disadvantaged employees would cause resentment by other employees.

Finally, the businessmen pointed out that Knoxville has a large number of small, family-owned businesses and very few large companies employing more than 100 people. They maintained that while large firms could probably absorb a few "nonproductive" employees, smaller companies could not.

The panel acknowledged a desire to exercise more corporate social responsibility for the disadvantaged. "But we need help," summarized one executive. "Most of our firms are too small to take on an extensive program alone, but perhaps by pooling our efforts and getting some help with the special training and counseling from the schools and other agencies, we can begin."

"WORKING POOR"

By virtue of their close involvement with Knoxville's disadvantaged population, the directors of the Urban League and Community Action Committee were particularly well qualified to present the job-related problems of this group. They revealed that 60% of those classified as economically disadvantaged in Knoxville, were "working poor" — employed but not earning enough to support themselves and their families decently. "Only 20% of Knoxville's poor are able to work and currently out of a job," said the CAC Director. "So it isn't as if these people aren't willing to work. Most *are* working, but for incredibly low wages."

"There are a number of reasons why the disadvantaged tend not to respond to industry's 'help wanted' ads," continued the Director of the CAC. Most of them have been to company employment offices more than once and either have been turned away because they had no high school diploma, or have taken tests, filled out applications and told to 'wait for a call' which never came. It doesn't take many such experiences to convince a person to give up."

DISADVANTAGED CHARACTERISTICS

The Urban League Director outlined some characteristics of the disadvantaged that create problems in finding and holding onto jobs. Awareness of their inability to communicate effectively with superiors at work creates feelings of frustration and inferiority. Repeated failures in school and on the job foster a feeling they have no control over their own lives. This may lead to envy of, and hostility toward, those more prosperous than themselves; to apathy; and to preoccupation with immediate survival as opposed to thoughts of bettering one's future station in life.

"Arrests among the disadvantaged establishes records which employers may use to screen them out of jobs," the Urban League Director went on, "yet a high percentage of the arrests do not result in convictions. A police record should be studied carefully and weighed against an applicant's strengths rather than used as a basis for automatic rejection."

Both community leaders stressed the need for job training based on a realistic assessment of job opportunities. "What could be more frustrating for the man who has finally completed a lengthy training course than to find there are no job openings in his field?" asked the CAC Director.

MORE INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT

For the seminar a descriptive listing of all occupational preparation programs in Knoxville was prepared. The first afternoon session gave local vocational education officials, MDTA program directors and representatives of other training programs an opportunity to call attention to their programs and to comment on their needs. The universal request was for more involvement from industry in (1) advising program officials of industry's manpower needs, (2) assisting with curriculum planning and teaching methodology and (3) offering part-time jobs to in-school youth enrolled in vocational curricula.

The interpretive study survey revealed that private industry and the schools are cooperating in a variety of programs aimed at job-training the disadvantaged. For in-school youth (including potential dropouts) these programs include curriculum planning assistance from industry, plant visits by students and teachers and work experience related to course work. School dropouts under age 22 are served by vocational guidance programs and work-experience coupled with basic education, counseling and pre-work orientation. For the hard-core unemployed being trained for jobs, schools assist with basic education, counseling and pre-work orientation. Some companies involve the schools in their continuing education for all employees, including diploma-oriented academic work, remedial education and skills retraining.

Representatives of six diverse cooperative programs in cities other than Knoxville made the case for industry-school cooperation. "The fact that there is no current shortage of trained workers in Knoxville does not mean that this will always be the case," warned a personnel director from Richmond, Virginia, "Industry must exercise its social responsibility now by taking part in designing new school curricula that will train potential employees to meet industry's future needs."

This same representative predicted that competition for manpower would increase as many larger companies establish plants in the South during the 1970s. This factor, plus an inevitable expansion of unionization in some industries currently paying such low wages, should contribute to a general increase in earnings.

NEW SELECTION PRACTICES

Experience with disadvantaged employees is forcing industry to take another look at its old screening devices and employment requirements. "Is a high school diploma really necessary for a member of the plant maintenance force?" asked one representative. Many companies are beginning to create career ladders by restructurizing jobs — divid-

ing them into simple and complex parts — so persons with lower capabilities can be hired to do the simpler tasks and present employees working below ability level can be promoted to more complex jobs. Personnel tests formerly used to screen out applicants are now being used to assess capabilities and aid in placement. Each employee is encouraged to advance to a position in line with his highest capabilities through a company-sponsored program of continuing education and upgrade training. Often cooperation with the schools is the most satisfactory and economical way to provide these educational opportunities.

All representatives of cooperative programs agreed that job training alone is not enough to successfully integrate the disadvantaged into the work force. "Generally speaking, the more structure the school and company are willing to put into a program, the better its chances of success," said a spokesman for a program in Cleveland. "Components of a good program include pre-work orientation, skill training, remedial work in communications and arithmetic, consumer education, individual counseling and help with transportation, health problems and child care."

When in-school youth are the target of a cooperative program, industry assists by providing some pre-work orientation and on-the-job experience. When the schools take part in a company program for adults formerly considered unemployable, counseling and assistance with remedial education may be provided by school personnel. "We find school cooperation a distinct economic advantage in our hard-core training," commented one industry representative.

HELP FROM SCHOOLS

"Management of money creates some of the most serious troubles our new trainees face," said the director of a retailing program for the hard-to-employ. "For the first week we provide car fare and lunch money to assure attendance. We also pay the trainees at the end of each day for a time because they haven't be-

gun to set long-term goals and immediate gratification increases motivation. Then we begin consumer education: the value of comparative shopping, savings, credit, etc. School personnel are responsible for this part of the program."

Transporting program participants to the training site has been accomplished through employee car pools by some companies. Others conduct the whole program in the cooperating school or another facility in the area where most participants live.

"Community agencies such as the employment security office and the welfare department can be of great help in a cooperative program," pointed out one program representative. "We call on them to use their contacts among the disadvantaged in recruiting and later we may refer participants to them for medical attention, psychological help or assistance in obtaining child care services."

"Small companies should certainly not be discouraged by the risks of taking on a disadvantaged employee," asserted a Memphis training director.

"By joining a consortium of other companies with similar needs, or by taking part in a cooperative program, the small company actually expands its outreach in recruiting and its resources for training. Many are pleasantly surprised by the performance of their 'nonproductive' trainees too!"

TOP COMMITMENT

In rounding out the panel presentation, exemplary program representatives emphasized the need for top level commitment by both school and company officials. Those responsible for operating a training program must have the unqualified support of top administrators in order to convince the teachers and supervisors of the importance of making the effort. Special training for teachers and supervisors is essential to sensitize them to the needs and problems which the disadvantaged bring to the work environment. School personnel can alert

the company to the learning handicaps of trainees; and company personnel can familiarize teachers with industry's expectations for employee performance. "When top management supports a training program for the disadvantaged and communicates to all employees a sincere commitment to the program's goals, you just don't encounter negative reactions to special consideration for program participants," a Chicago representative assured the audience. "This is particularly true when upgrading opportunities are available for all employees," he continued.

NEW CAREER PATTERNS EMERGING FOR BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS

INDUSTRY INITIATIVE

From the tone of the questions put to panel members, it was apparent that the information had generated excitement. Several businessmen asked about costs for the programs and were told that the federal government is making funds available through the Department of Labor MA program and other sources to compensate employers for the extra costs of training the disadvantaged. It was apparent that local school and community agency personnel were leaving the initiative to business and industry for making concrete proposals. As

Business administration, engineering and science dominate trends in the fields of study now being chosen by black college students, it was disclosed by College Placement Services, inc., Bethlehem, Pa., a non-profit organization which develops career counseling and placement programs at traditionally Negro colleges.

In its first monograph, prepared by Dr. Gary J. Scott, of the Pennsylvania State University Student Affairs Division, CPS reported on a three-year study of 58 public and private Negro colleges in 19 states. The study, conducted between 1965 and 1968, was made possible by a Ford Foundation grant; it is the first depth survey of its kind ever made.

Baccalaureate degrees in business administration increased 121% from 1965 to 1968 among males and 76% among females, the CPS report disclosed. Negro engineering graduates increased 32% among males, while science graduates advanced 19% among males and 32% among females. Despite these dramatic increases, the business administration and engineering degrees represent less than 10% of those awarded by traditionally Negro colleges.

In terms of actual numbers, Negro male and female graduates received most of their degrees in education, with liberal arts next and science third. Over one-third of the graduates studied educa-

tion, down about 14% from 1965; one-quarter majored in liberal arts courses, also down 14% from 1965; and one-eighth concentrated on science, an increase of nearly 20% in the three-year study period.

the meeting drew to a close it seemed that a number of company representatives were much closer to taking that initiative than they had been prior to the seminar. As the personnel director of one of the city's largest companies expressed it, "There seem to be legitimate incentives for the schools and industry to team up in job training. Assistance from industry makes vocational education more realistic and more attractive to kids. And companies can take advantage of school facilities and teaching expertise in providing opportunities for disadvantaged employees."

Last year's male graduates chose education as an initial career, with 40% of them entering that field; about half that many went into business. Graduate study was pursued by 14% of the males. Two-thirds of the women graduates went into education, whereas 10% went to graduate school and nearly the same number selected business.

The combined totals in the study on graduates' selection of initial careers revealed that 56% chose education, just four times the number of males and females who entered the business world. Graduate study was a close third, with 12% of all students surveyed selecting that pursuit.

Total male enrollment at the colleges surveyed increased about the same as female enrollment decreased, the College Placement Services monograph reports. Although the percentage of change is small, and women still outnumber men by about 10%, the study indicated a trend that males may soon outnumber female students. Total enrollment in the 58 colleges increased 10% during the three-year study.