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NEW DIRECTIONS FOR DISADVANTAGED ADULTS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ABSTRACT: There is a need today for new methods of helping disadvantaged adults and youth through community colleges. Canadian community colleges can help in the delivery of educational and service programs to a long neglected student. This article describes a life-skills program with its major objective to assist disadvantaged adults in obtaining employment opportunities. There is a need for faculty to respond to the culturally different, for a new curriculum which has been modified to their needs, and for new teaching consistent with learning styles of the alienated. Specific program guide-lines are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Many disadvantaged adults have a complex, interlocking set of inadequate behaviors (Giroux & Pietrofesa, 1973, pp. 2-5). Some lack the skills needed to identify problems, to recognize and organize relevant information, to describe reasonable courses of action, and to foresee the consequences; they often fail to act on a rationally identified course of action, submitting rather to actions based on emotion or authority. Often they do not benefit from their experience since they do not evaluate the results of their actions once taken, and display fatalistic rationalizations of the consequences. Many disadvantaged have low levels of participation in the society surrounding them and few belong to voluntary organizations. They lack effective ways of seeking help from each other and from agencies already in existence, although some form of public assistance provides much of their income. Long periods of unemployment or frequent job changes mark their work history. They have ineffective interpersonal relationships and lack basic communication skills. They lack the self-confidence to develop their abilities, and have low, or often surprisingly unrealistic aspiration levels (Pietrofesa, Giroux, & Clifton, 1973, pp. 1-2).

There is a need for new methods of resolving current social problems. They are needed now. They cannot be invented by surveys or armchair

methods. They can be invented only by means of action-research which conceives, develops, tests, and evaluates various methods in real-life situations until useful and constructive methods are developed.

In an attempt to face this crisis, the community college, considered by many as the new frontier in education, is being called on for help: help in the delivery of educational and service programs to a long neglected and newly discovered student and his community.

LIFE-SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The disadvantaged adult has been alienated by present institutional programs and has rejected them as a means of developing the talents which would enable him to contribute to society. As a result, he is a part of the low-income group, has a low educational level, has little self-esteem, is unemployed, and is generally dependent on welfare agencies to sustain himself in society.

The problem becomes one of providing life skills which enable him to obtain the needed education or job to raise his aspirational levels and improve his self-concept. As a result, he can realize his potentials and maximize his contribution to his family, his community, and the larger society. The problem is more than just the provision of therapy. It becomes the assimilation by this person of skills he has never had the opportunity to learn in a meaningful manner.

In short, higher education finds a *new student* (i.e. the disadvantaged adult) in its midst and must re-order the current institutional arrangement of programs and services to meet more effectively his own and his community's needs.

PURPOSE OF A LIFE-SKILLS PROGRAM

The major objective of the life-skills program should be to assist the disadvantaged adult to re-enter the world of work by preparing him for immediate employment or for further vocational training which would provide employment opportunities.

Generally, the objectives can be summarized as follows:

1. To provide sufficient learning experiences which raise the educational level of disadvantaged adults and lead directly to employment.

2. To provide essential skills that will prepare the disadvantaged adult for further vocational training that leads to employment.

3. To create an environment and climate where the self-esteem of the disadvantaged adult is enhanced.

4. To assist disadvantaged adults to develop *realistic* aspirational levels and goals which are consistent with their skills through intensive counseling support programs.

5. To provide the human-relations and problem-solving skills to help the disenfranchised to live responsibly and objectively.

6. To formulate behaviorally oriented learning experiences which are conducive to the learning style of the disadvantaged adult, which will assist him in becoming a functional member of society.

Therefore, the objectives of the program are designed to assist each participant to achieve a more dignified and satisfying life style by means of securing productive employment as measured by the individual and society. Thoreson (1967) found that a behavioral approach was successful in encouraging college accomplishments in disadvantaged youth.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Need for New Delivery Systems for Disadvantaged

In disadvantaged communities there are few museums, art galleries, art schools, libraries or theaters. In addition to living with physical ugliness, residents suffer from unemployment, poor education, family instability, illegitimacy, crime, drug addiction and alcoholism, frequent illness, and early death. There is a lack of recreational and cultural outlets and the street has become a social institution.

Creative delivery systems need to be designed and implemented. A variety of outreach methods such as drop-in centres, store-front programs, testing and counselling services, use of community agencies, surveys and mobile units have all been tried and often with little success. The reason generally is a lack of clear objectives, and limited funding, as well as the lack of a conception of an integrated plan or program. Programs similar to these can and will work if given appropriate funding, objectives, and sufficient lead time to carry out their part of a master plan of an institution. Negative attitudes of disadvantaged students can change as a result of their college experiences (Jones & Finnell, 1972).

Community Services and Delivery Systems

There are broad implications in these situations for community services programs designed to upgrade the educational and technical skills of hardcore urban poor. These implications involve such allied problems as effective communication techniques necessary for reaching the inner-city community, the problem of white staff involvement in inner-city college programs, and the broad role of an effective inner-city community services program functioning as an intercessory between the college and the inner-city resident and his community.

Delivery System and Curriculum and Staff

We need to explore *new types of curriculum, new types of faculty, and new types of teaching methods*. Most college faculty members have a middle-class background and corresponding values; their training and experiences do not respond to the culture of the disadvantaged adult. An imposition of values is exactly what alienates the *new* student. The "do it as I did it" syndrome takes over and results in alienation. Many activities of a "responsive" community services program can be stifled by "old guard" faculty attitudes. Tate and

Delworth (1973) point to attitudes and behaviors by college staff which alienate disadvantaged students. Yet Shaffer (1973) found that academic success of disadvantaged students was related to acceptance of their professors. Bureaucratic action can totally immobilize any attempt to respond to the apparent needs of the disadvantaged in the community. There is a need for *new faculty* to respond to the culturally different; a *new curriculum* which has been modified to meet the needs of individuals and has been mutually contracted; and *new teaching methods* which are consistent with the learning styles of the alienated adult who has been turned off by traditional methods.

Characteristics of the Delivery Systems of New Programs

The present educational model and its format does not readily lend itself to programs for the disadvantaged. Because of institutional bureaucracies and master contracts, the flexibility of any system that attempts to respond to the community is strangled. IT IS ESSENTIAL TO POSSESS THE ABILITY TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY. The new model includes a new faculty, a new curriculum, and a new teaching methodology which encompasses a new language. More specifically the faculty is one that is familiar with the "culturally different" and can respond to their individual needs. The curriculum is on an individualized basis and the students can contract for that portion which will meet their needs and, finally, the teaching methodology is based on solid learning principles that will create all the necessary conditions for the disadvantaged adult to grow. The new model of which we are speaking should be viewed as short-term, meaning one to three years. This allows the project staff to respond to the needs of the community. After approximately three years a new project is required by the changing community. The new model lends itself to contracting with individuals, contracting for specialized services, or even contracting for a total program which might be in operation. These programs should be concerned with *people development* and not with "collecting college credit." Therefore, they are not necessarily a part of the college calendar.

Finally, the new model is one that is funded on the basis of provision of services for a total program rather than a piecemeal approach. Some other specific characteristics of the new model would be:

1. *Decentralization*

The model should reach out to the people and be located in areas of the community which are compatible with the learning styles of the individuals.

2. *Staffing*

Staff should be selected on the basis of their ability to deliver the required skills and not on academic standards. There should be

provision for the training of staff, and funds should be allotted for this purpose.

Outside consultants, and the contracting of specialized services should be a way of life and a way that most enhances the effectiveness of the program.

There should be an opportunity for lead time and for planning.

THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT

Government officials must play a significant role in providing leadership for these programs. It is important for them to establish policies which allow programs to respond with effective delivery systems and not be strangled by the present bureaucracy. They have an important responsibility to provide the necessary funds to meet the needs of the culturally different. It is extremely important for government officials to coordinate interministry resources so that all agencies and everyone concerned can walk hand in hand to help the culturally different. Further, the government has an important role in coordinating information on existing programs so that other communities may benefit from successful pilot projects.

Finally, the government can do much to create the conditions for the training of individuals who are capable, willing, and dedicated to provide programs for the culturally different of this country.

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

The Need for Guidelines

Many community colleges see the need for developing programs concerning urban needs but have not yet established them because they had no guidelines to follow. The result has sometimes been that any programs which have been activated have too often been only incidental to the regular college offerings. THERE IS A NEED FOR CLEAR GUIDELINES.

Some Specific Guidelines

Following are several program guidelines:

1. The program should be designed to meet the needs of broad clusters of high-risk students who are alienated from the present establishment. Included among these high-risk students are: school dropouts; hard core unemployed; ex-convicts; ex-drug users and abusers; ethnic groups and other minorities who would be identified as being disadvantaged economically, socially, geographically, or ethnically.

2. There should be a commitment to contracting, whether they be services, individuals, or programs. Ideally, the new model should be contracting for those services which will provide the best delivery system.

3. A new model is required that contains the necessary flexibility in the delivery system to respond to the community without being strangled by the present structure found in most institutions.

4. Institutes, staff exchanges, and training programs need to be developed and funded if adequate personnel are going to be available to deliver these programs. A total approach should be taken and funded rather than a piecemeal approach.

5. New collaborative methods need to be developed so ministries, agencies, and other concerned people work side by side for the same goal — that of helping the disadvantaged.

6. There should be funding for programs from one to three years. Programs as differentiated from courses provide for identifying the needs in the community. Such programs would be: women's centres, correction services, outreach programs, and other programs where there is a need. These programs assist in identifying the needs for particular courses.

7. There should be a commitment to experimental pilot programs on a short-term basis of up to one year. Once a pilot program has demonstrated itself to be an effective delivery system, funding should be provided for up to three years so that necessary planning can be done.

8. Policies to continue programs for up to three years should be established wherever possible as they provide maximum development for the disadvantaged in the community and maintain an effective level of planning and staff development.

9. Exchanges of staffs should be developed between colleges once a program has proven to be effective and is no longer required in a specific community. The program should not be for college credit so as to avoid the bureaucratic entanglements with curriculum committees. Accreditation could be applied for, following the program, wherever desirable.

10. Funding should be provided for start-up programs such as surveys, studies, or other outreach programs designed to collaborate with agencies in order to identify needs and establish programs or courses.

11. An individualized approach to learning should be developed so that each person can work at his own speed. Also a continuous system of intake and graduation should be maintained so that the program has maximum flexibility.

12. The program should be viewed as a community service and should be offered through the community-services program of a college and into a decentralized setting.

In conclusion, and in view of the many commonalities found in community services programs for disadvantaged, it seems critically important that a consortium of helping personnel in community-service programs come together to share their ideas and focus on a set of recommended practices and procedures for the initiation and implementation of programs of intervention for the *new student* in the culturally different community.

RESUME: Il y a un besoin de nos jours d'utiliser de nouvelles méthodes pour aider les adultes et les jeunes désavantagés dans les collèges communautaires. Les collèges communautaires canadiens peuvent aider à procurer des programmes de formation et d'assistance à un type d'étudiant longtemps délaissé. Cet article décrit un programme centré sur l'acquisition d'habiletés à s'adapter dont l'objectif principal est d'aider les adultes désavantagés à obtenir des emplois. Il faut trouver des professeurs qui peuvent répondre aux besoins de ceux qui diffèrent au plan culturel. Il faut trouver un nouveau programme scolaire qui serait adapté aux besoins de ce groupe et qui ferait usage de méthodes d'enseignement appropriées. On présente ici, dans ses grandes lignes, un programme spécifique.

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