COLORADO'S URBAN EXTENSION PILOT PROGRAM

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The objective of the Urban Pilot Project in a suburb of Denver is to develop and test informal educational programs with urban youth and young adults. The program focuses on those who have not previously been reached by conventional educational programs or who have special educational needs. Learning experiences are provided through small groups and individual contacts. The participants are mainly Spanish-American or Mexican-American. Their families tend to be employed as laborers or unskilled workers, and some are on welfare. The program is conducted from Colorado State University in cooperation with Adams County, which is part of the Denver metropolitan area.

BACKGROUND UNDERSTANDINGS

Our main concern is development of people. Whether we work with rich, poor, black, brown, red, white, young, or old people, the common denominator is people.

The first prerequisite in working with our people, or with anyone else, is to have a sincere understanding or appreciation of them and their situation—a positive concern to want to empathize and to see and to feel. We, as professionals, must have knowledge about human behavior, not to provide answers or solutions but in order that we may ask the right questions in attempting to understand. Our attitudes must be positive, acceptant, and nonjudgmental, so the people with whom we work may develop confidence in us. We are often asked by people wanting to know about our program, "What do these people want?" I would say, "They want what you and I want."

Louis Lomax stated this so descriptively in his book, *The Negro Revolt*. While he speaks for the Negro I feel his statement applies to all people: "We want the right to be ordinary, to be, as individuals, like everybody else; some good, some bad; some wise, some foolish; here and there a genius, now and then a fool."

The second prerequisite of our project is to base the programs on the participants' concerns and not on what we think they need. We start with them and their problems because *change begins where*

the people are and *where their interests lie.* This means that we and the programs we direct must be flexible and ready to change as the people grow in confidence and in skills. The people in the program must be free to help develop those programs in which they are participating.

In his book, *The Structure of Freedom,* Christian Bay stated, "A person is *free* to the extent that he has the *capacity,* the *opportunity,* and the *incentive* to give expression to what is in him and to develop his potentialities."

THE CONCEPT

Any type of program aimed at education and development of people must take into consideration these basic understandings. The concept around which the Pilot Project was designed is applicable to all people regardless of age, race, income, or place of residence. It is based on the premise that as a person grows and matures through life, he is at the same time learning his way through life. All of the different things that a person must learn in a lifetime are known as the developmental tasks of life.

A developmental task is a growing up problem which arises because of changing demands placed on the individual. The tasks are a combined result of physical maturation, psychological development, and the interaction of the individual with society. Every person experiences similar developmental tasks from birth to old age, although not always at the same time. Successful mastery of each task at each stage depends upon the success that the individual had in the preceding stage. For example, in order for an adolescent to be reasonably happy and successful he must have mastered the growing up problems of middle childhood. Illustrative of this, one task a teenager must face is understanding, accepting, and capitalizing on his physique. If he is unable to become proud, or at least tolerant, of his body and able to use his body effectively, this may affect his immediate and future interpersonal relationships since they are so dependent upon his perception of himself and upon how others perceive him. Following is a list of developmental tasks.[1]

    I. Infancy and Early Childhood (from birth to about 6 years)

        1. Learning to walk.

        2. Learning to take solid foods.

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[1]David Gottlieb and Charles E. Ramsey, *The American Adolescent,* Dorsey Press, Homewood, Illinois, 1964, and Robert J. Havighurst, *Developmental Tasks and Education,* David McKay Company, Inc., New York, 1952.

3. Learning to talk.

4. Learning to control the elimination of body wastes.

5. Learning sex differences and sexual modesty.

6. Achieving physiological stability.

7. Learning simple concepts of social and physical reality.

8. Learning to relate oneself emotionally to parents, family, and others.

9. Learning to distinguish right and wrong, and developing a conscience.

II. Middle Childhood (from about 6 to about 12 years)

1. Learning physical skills necessary for ordinary games.

2. Building wholesome attitudes toward oneself as a growing organism.

3. Learning to get along with age-mates.

4. Learning an appropriate masculine or feminine social role.

5. Developing fundamental skills in reading, writing, and calculating.

6. Developing ideas necessary for every-day living.

7. Developing conscience, morality, and a scale of values.

8. Achieving personal independence.

9. Developing attitudes toward social groups and institutions.

III. Adolescence (from about 12 to about 18 years)

1. Understanding, accepting, and capitalizing on one's physique.

2. Understanding, accepting, and achieving a masculine or feminine role, getting along with age-mates.

3. Learning to become increasingly self-directive with adults, and yet to work cooperatively with adults whose help is needed.

4. Learning about job opportunities in relation to realistic interests and potentials.

     5. Learning skills necessary for meaningful and responsible relationships between self and others.

     6. Learning beginning skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for marriage and family life.

IV. Early Adulthood (from about 19 to about 30 years)

     1. Selecting a mate.

     2. Learning to live with a marriage partner.

     3. Starting a family.

     4. Rearing children.

     5. Managing a home.

     6. Getting started in an occupation.

     7. Taking on civic responsibility.

     8. Finding a congenial social group.

V. Middle Age (from about 30 to about 55 years)

     1. Achieving adult civic and social responsibility.

     2. Establishing and maintaining an economic standard of living.

     3. Assisting teenage children to become responsible and happy adults.

     4. Developing adult leisure-time activities.

     5. Relating oneself to one's marriage partner as a person.

     6. Accepting and adjusting to the physiological changes of middle age.

     7. Adjusting to aging parents.

VI. Later Maturity (from about 55 years onward)

     1. Adjusting to decreasing physical strength and health.

     2. Adjusting to retirement and reduced income.

     3. Adjusting to the death of a spouse.

     4. Establishing an explicit affiliation with one's age group.

     5. Meeting social and civic obligations.

     6. Establishing satisfactory physical living arrangements.

The developmental task becomes useful to the educator only when he uses it in the *timing of educational experiences.* Our understanding of the developmental tasks can help us listen for *the teachable moment*—that moment when the question is asked and all conditions are most favorable for learning.

The most meaningful educational experiences in our program have been those that have been the direct result of a question or concern of one of the participants. For example: One of the teenagers wanted to know how a bill was passed, so arrangements were made to visit the state capital and talk to some of the legislators. One of the girls who was already very thin asked, "How do I get rid of baby fat?" A discussion followed about body growth and maturity. Another girl asked, "How do you get venereal disease?" The next lesson covered the subject in depth.

Understanding the developmental tasks for each life stage can also aid the educator in anticipating the kinds of concerns that his audience may express, and it may help with selection of the most appropriate and most meaningful educational experience. For example, the developmental tasks tell us that an adolescent is ready and willing to assume more responsibility, so wouldn't it be appropriate to let him take over the planning of his own programs? He needs opportunity for active experiences which will provide him freedom with responsibility and freedom from dependence on adults and yet the opportunity to work cooperatively with adults. In planning programs adults can help youth see alternatives as each new decision arises and can be facilitators. Thus, the learner receives personal satisfaction from his active learning experience, and this provides continued motivation.

Evaluation of our efforts also becomes more feasible in that we are more cognizant of what we are attempting to achieve through program efforts. Our objective is consistently the developmental task. Once aware of the developmental need that is evidenced by a person's concerns, we can begin to watch for signs indicating that learning has taken place. If signs are not seen, we assume that we did not interpret the learner's concerns correctly or that we did not answer them adequately.

THE PROGRAM

The success or failure of the Urban Program depends on the nonprofessional program assistants and their ability to interpret the developmental needs of the people with whom they work. Thus, the program assistant is the key to tailoring the program to the learner.

Our program assistants, two employed full time and four part time, are all of Mexican or Spanish ethnic background and are full-time residents of the communities in which they work. They are obviously liked and respected by those who live around them. They can communicate not only with people in their community but also with professionals. They were selected for a number of reasons, but one of the prime reasons was their obvious regard for people of all kinds, and their ability to see and feel like the people with whom they work. Equally important is their listening ability. This is crucial to detection of the participants' real life concerns, and ultimately for recognition of the teachable moment.

Following are some of the things that happen in the development of a program.

1. The program assistant contacts a friend, a relative, a friend of a friend, or some of the kids she knows in the neighborhood. Any one of a number of questions may be asked to determine if they might be potential program participants:

"If you had a chance, is there anything you'd like to learn about?"

"Would you like to get together with some of the other kids once in awhile and do some things that *you* want to do?"

"Is there anything you'd like to do?"

"What kinds of things interest you most?"

"What bugs you more than anything?"

If the person's response indicates even a little interest, the program assistant may arrange to call on them informally again, or the program assistant may suggest getting together at a certain time or place with some of their friends. Teenagers' meetings are usually held at the home of one of the program assistants. The young adults meet at each other's homes or at the program assistants' homes.

2. Either with the individual or with the group, the program assistant attempts to find out what general area the learners are most interested in. This is done by using a brainstorming technique which draws out each individual's questions on a variety of subjects. Usually two program assistants work together; one listens and writes while the other does the talking. Eventually, the individual or group reaches a decision about where to begin.

Some of the areas covered by youth have been: personal development, sex education, getting along with parents, venereal disease, grooming, dress, law enforcement, drama (play acting), and camp

(program planning, implementation, and counseling). The young adult participants have been exposed to educational experiences dealing with: early marriage relationships, family life, consumer credit and buying, furniture refinishing, child development, nutrition and physical fitness, economical cooking, home decorating, money management, sewing and clothing selection, and vocational testing and counseling.

3. When the program assistant and the participants have determined the priority program area, the next problem is to identify specific concerns. Sometimes the program assistants meet individually with participants and probe in depth until they have determined each individual's personal questions and interests on the topic. If the learners appear comfortable in a group, a brainstorm session is held again to compile a list of questions pertaining to the specific concern. The teenagers asked these kinds of questions:

"How come parents are so concerned about our physical changes?"

"Why do some parents let the girls stay out late?"

"Why don't they trust you?"

"Do parents have a right to peek in your private letters or mail?"

These questions led into the next session devoted to getting along with parents. Answers to the questions started immediately where the kids were and not where the professional thought their interest should be.

At one meeting the girls were discussing the physical development of girls and the kinds of body changes that take place during the teen years. This was followed by the obvious, "What happens when boys grow up?" The next session dealt with exactly this, and it provoked questions about venereal disease like, "How do you get it?" This was the next topic, and the group learned the answer.

Some of the young adults who were interested in the general area of child development expressed these questions to the program assistant:

"Why do some women have more patience than others with their children?"

"Why do some mothers favor one child more than others?"

"Why do children form gangs?"

Another young adult group voiced questions that eventually led

to an in-depth human relations series, which is still nowhere near completion. Some of their questions were:

"Why does society set rules for people to follow?"

"Why do men go to other women?"

"Why is it hard to admit our own faults?"

The question technique allows the educator to identify the gaps between the learner's present knowledge and what he wants to know —thus, giving rise to the teachable moment.

4. The next step is for the program assistant to meet with one of the program directors or another resource person to decide what educational experiences are needed. The program assistant comes prepared to interpret the learners' interests as he or she sees them and with written questions. The program assistant and the professional decide on the content area to be covered—usually limited to one or two principal ideas—and what methods will be employed. Sometimes the program assistant is taught the material by a specialist from the faculty, business, or an appropriate agency, and she, in turn, teaches the group. Sometimes a specialist is carefully selected to do the job, and sometimes a field experience is organized. Before a final decision is reached, the participants are again consulted to see if the methods selected are agreeable. The program assistant makes most of the contacts with resource people, although at first this was not the case. The program assistant has been gradually trained for this role.

5. While the learning experience is taking place, whether it be a consumer credit discussion, a visit to the legislature, a planning session for a Mexican dinner, or a week at camp, the program assistant has certain responsibilities. These are:

a. Facilitating continuous involvement of the participants.

b. Observing both positive and negative reactions of the participants by watching what they do and listening to what they say.

c. Helping participants see the consequences of alternate choices, yet not making decisions for them.

6. The final step occurs when the program assistant meets periodically with the program directors to evaluate the project. The program assistant keeps a running log on each individual with whom he or she works. Any evidence—what is done or said—indicating a behavioral change is recorded. The program assistant discusses each bit of observed behavior with us, and we attempt to relate the behavior to one of the developmental tasks. The observed behavior

becomes the operational definition of the developmental task. The eventual aim is to collect the data on behavioral changes as they relate to the developmental task objective and use it to further improve the action program.

The developmental task concept is just one of many educational concepts that can serve as a workable and relatively foolproof tool for the educator in the community. It provides an easy yet effective means for program planning, and it also lends itself well to a practical type of evaluation. It provides assurance of objectives that are possible and learning experiences that are consistent with human development.

In summary, the approach used in the Urban Extension Pilot Program is as follows:

1. Understand the developmental task concept and use it as a listening framework.

2. Know self and learner and accept him.

3. Know what society expects of the learner.

4. Begin where the learner is, with his interests and problems.

5. Actively and confidently involve the learner in planning his own program.

6. Program assistant, resource person, and learner interact to plan appropriate learning experiences and short-term objectives.

7. Program assistant organizes learning experiences.

8. Learning experience takes place but remains flexible to change.

9. Program assistant, resource person, and learner interact to evaluate.

EMERGING CONCLUSIONS

1. Given the opportunity, the participants do choose educational programs appropriate to mastery of developmental tasks.

2. Given an accepting, nonjudgmental environment, participants tend to join and maintain membership in a group, participate openly, and assume responsibility for self and self-other relationships.

3. Given reliable information about participants, carefully selected resource people are both willing and able to communicate technical information to the participants.

4. Given flexible, slightly structured programs in which the re-

sources and participants are responsibly involved in all stages of program development, there is greater interest, participation, and continuity of program, with more significant learning as a result.

5. Given full development of the project concept, documented effectiveness with assessment of failures and successes, and face-to-face contact with participants and staff, legislators and other key policy makers will not only provide financial support but will actively seek out new avenues for financing and commitment of resources.