

SCHOOL COLLEGE ORIENTATION PROGRAM OF PITTSBURGH
S.C.O.P.P.

From June 15 to July 31

I visited this program July 2 and 3.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this program is to aid undermotivated and under-achieving Pittsburgh high school youngsters from disadvantaged areas to acquire the interest and skills to attend college. They are boys and girls of adequate to superior intelligence who, because of poor preparation and low level of aspiration, would not normally think of college or prepare properly for it.

This summer the children attended classes on the campus of the Carnegie Institute of Technology and lived at home except for the final week of the session, when they moved to a Tech dorm.

Next year, as 11th graders, they will attend special Saturday classes.

Next summer they will live and take their meals on the Tech campus while studying in a new academic program aimed at college admission.

As 12th graders they will continue with Saturday classes.

Money to support them in college is being raised from the Pittsburgh community by an organization known as NEED, headed by Tech Dean Coleman.

Participants

There were 43 in the group, Negro except for 11. 15 were girls, both Negro and white. The group as a whole represented 11 of the 13 Pittsburgh high schools but came mainly from Westinghouse, Fifth Avenue, and Schenley, with large Negro enrollments.

Nominations for this project were made by counselors in the high schools. The children nominated had grades well below their potential, but rarely showed failing grades since those that badly off went to regular summer sessions to earn credit. The special counselors engaged for the summer program then went into the home of each nominee and talked with both the child and the parent. The counselors openly and enthusiastically urged acceptance of this opportunity. The great majority of

parents and children accepted, with one or two refusals apparently on racial grounds.

The Staff

It is an impressive staff in both quality and quantity. It includes, in addition to its administrative director Dean Lawrence Canjar of Carnegie Tech and its program director John H. Morgart, recently retired after 43 years of distinguished service as head of Negro schools in Pittsburgh, the following:

- 2 teachers of English
- 2 teachers of biology
- 2 teachers of mathematics
- 3 counselors
- 1 psychiatric social worker

10 - A ratio of about 1 adult to 4 youngsters. I marvel at the lavish staffing of all these summer programs for the disadvantaged!

The staff is integrated to the extent of two Negro teachers and one Negro counselor, the head counselor, William Green, a good man.

A unique feature of the staffing is that each class (for purposes of instruction the group of 43 is divided in half) has two teachers, one from a Pittsburgh high school, one from Carnegie Tech (in one case Mount Mercy College). Both teachers are present in each class, alternating in leadership, but active as a team. This is an unusual and effective combination.

The Academic Program

The morning was composed of 50 minute classes of Biology, Mathematics, and English. In the afternoons from 1:00-3:00 p.m. Biology lab alternated with periods for library study and counseling.

Biology used one of the three texts recently produced by the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, the bio-chemical approach, I think.

Math was entirely first-year Algebra and used MSG materials. All the group had studied Algebra before and had had geometry, but previous exposure was of little or no help.

Grades were given in all courses.

English used the novel Ethan Frome and Six Modern Plays for class study. There were 8 outside writing assignments, including book reviews on outside reading, and vocabulary drills. Later in the session the students will work on expository prose from dittoed exercises prepared by the teachers.

There was also practice and instruction in public speaking.

The class in English which I attended was devoted to a discussion of O'Neill's The Emperor Jones. Had I not been told that the youngsters were unmotivated, I would not have guessed it; they were interested and had done the reading. The teaching moved at a fast pace but used the traditional question-answer-recitation technique and dealt conventionally with the text. Student answers were very brief; there was no discussion or defense of positions such as I saw at Princeton.

I am hoping that some summer session will develop for the undermotivated, underachieving student some really new approaches to learning such as were (are?) being contemplated for North Carolina's Advancement School. Maybe the major need of such students is only teachers and counselors who really care. But maybe the deficiencies are deep enough to call for a radically unconventional approach to problems of learning. If new approaches and materials should work, they might prove to have wide applicability. They might have the same beneficial effect on the curriculum for slow students as the Advanced Placement movement has had on the curriculum of able students.

Athletics, Recreation, Social and Cultural Opportunities

The students had a play period in the afternoon after school, Mixing with youngsters from other summer programs, of which Tech has many, in music, in the arts, in Project Social Studies, in Project English, etc. The favored sports were volleyball, swimming, and basketball.

On Friday evenings the youngsters went to such events as civic light opera, plays, films, concerts, river cruises, big-league baseball games, and mixers. A special feature of S.C.O.P.P. is that each youngster has been given \$30 with which to buy the beginnings of a personal library. Also the project has a similar fund to finance attendance at cultural events. I shall be particularly glad to find out what happened in the book-buying.

Miscellaneous Impressions

Mr. Morgart was good enough to set up a staff meeting for me with all but one present. It is an able and attractive group, clearly dedicated, more open and responsive than similar eastern seaboard groups, I think. They answered questions freely and often discussed their problems as though no outsider were present. Here is some of what I learned.

Only seven or eight of the parents of the kids in the project were on public assistance, but many of the others were not much above the poverty level. Yet the counselors did not get the impression of a defeated group with a low level of expectation for their children.

At the time of my visit the counselors had not succeeded in getting from the children any clear notion of why they had done badly in school. All most would say was, "Oh, I just goofed off." Some, however, were beginning to suggest that they had been dragged down by the crowd they went with. A few laid the blame on poor teaching in their schools. I was curious as to how the youngsters in the project were being received by the gang upon returning home at night. The answer is, "So far, well received," but the staff has fingers crossed for next year.

In staff meeting I suggested that the reaction to these youngsters on the part of their teachers next year could be extremely important. Plans were then put in motion for an orientation dinner meeting next fall with at least the math and English teacher of each boy and girl. *for*

I was also curious as to how the program managed to entice into it kids known to be uninterested in school work. Apparently the chief lure is the prestige of being on a college campus. Carnegie exploited this well. One of the students' first possessions on arrival was the gift of a handsome notebook embossed with the Tech emblem.

I liked the teachers' addressing the students as Mr. and Miss to raise their sense of personal worth.

Had money been available, the counselors believe that twice the number of youngsters could have been found who met the program's specifications.

Of considerable interest to me is the matter of home work, in this and other programs for children for whom academic work has had no appeal. The Pittsburgh youngsters, on admission, were told that there would be no homework. It soon became obvious to all, however, that they could not get anywhere without steady outside assignments. So, by the time of my visit, substantial assignments were being given, with no student resentment or rebellion that I could detect. In somewhat similar, though less drastic fashion, the Princeton program began stepping up outside work after an exploratory opening period of time.

There was talk at the staff meeting of giving standardized I.Q. and reading tests at the end of the session to compare with similar data in the last school year, but I sensed little real enthusiasm for the idea.

I also had a long luncheon meeting with Deans Steinberg, Coleman, Simon, and Canjar of Carnegie Tech, a special committee charged with making policy for such programs as S.C.O.P.P. and the Institute for Negro historians. I have the impression of a highly alert, socially conscious group at this institution.

A cooperative school-college effort of the S.C.O.P.P. variety is excellent in its by-products. It is marvelous training

for the school people and brings out the best in them.

Finally, I keep wondering how programs could be devised to reach even younger kids, possibly at the 7th or 8th grade level. Far too many quite able youngsters, especially girls, get shunted off into commercial and vocational programs with not even a glimpse of the possibility of college until it is too late.

Alan R. Blackmer
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