

THE MODIFICATION OF BEHAVIOR THROUGH EDUCATION AND TRAINING

General Objective:

There is a vast area of human behavior which is subject to modification through education and training. In much of this area society has a large investment. A large portion of the national income is apportioned to the school system. The investment, however, extends far beyond the national educational budget to include that portion of the cost of police and penal administration, mental institutions and unrealized human potential that can rightfully be attributed to a partial failure of current education and training practices. It is the general aim of scientists in this area to develop the concepts and techniques most fruitful in bringing about relatively permanent changes in human behavior in the direction of social desirability in the broadest sense.

Special Questions:

No specific list of special problems or questions could be expected to cover the area. The following are some examples:

1. Guidance and counseling are now offered in a limited way to those who seek it. Evaluation and improvement of methods are necessary before we can estimate what social benefit would be obtained from universal guidance at appropriate times.
2. Are there particular times in the developmental sequence at which directive assistance is most effective?
3. How invariable are human capacities? Can proper training in early life improve adaptability and productivity in areas generally considered invariable?
4. What situational factors in infancy are correlated with normal emotional development?

5. To what extent can parent education produce shifts toward more normally adjusted children?

6. How can the dynamic concepts of psychotherapy be refined and made useful on a wider scale in education and training?

7. In view of the failure of different teaching methods to produce very different results in the performance of the group, can other approaches to education produce more efficient acquisition of scholastic material? An experimental study of motivation in learning might be expected to produce significant results. An individual rather than a group approach to the study of teaching method might reveal individual differences in method effectiveness not yielded by group scores.

8. How can we best bring about a utilization of what is known concerning what is effective and what is ineffective in educational practice?

9. Is a single educational program suitable for all students? What kinds of differences between children could be profitably made the basis for differential treatment?

10. What kinds of education and training are possible and effective in determining or changing community attitudes and behavior?

11. What concepts and techniques can be applied or developed for application to non-school groups such as automobile workers, farmers, management, citizens of Idaho, etc.?

12. To what extent can controlled training procedures make changes in mass behavior in socially significant areas?

Importance and Scope:

The problems in the area of modifiable human behavior are almost inestimable in terms of importance and scope. A society's health is in part a function of the extent to which its individual members are happy, adjusted

and productive, yet current educational expenditures are largely oriented toward teaching of curricular subject matter. Educational practices have on occasion gone for years or even centuries virtually unmodified and untested. This is true in spite of the tremendous changes in technology and social institutions which have made major changes in the needs of society. Such slowness in the acquisition of new information in this area and slowness in application of what is known is tolerable in stable times. It could be disastrous in the present unstable ones. The deliberate modification of some aspects of the behavior of large segments of the population of the world may be the best answer to some of the threatening aspects of the world situation.

Are These Problems Recognized?

There is not a problem indicated above which has not been recognized and given verbal statement many times. Nevertheless they remain problems for a variety of reasons.

Is Present Progress Satisfactory?

As was partly indicated above, the present rate of progress in this area might be acceptable in the ordinary course of events, but these unstable times create an urgent need for accelerated progress. Since the education and training functions have been institutionalized in school systems, etc., there is an existing mechanism for the application of improved methods. But basic knowledge of the principles of human learning and motivation is lacking. Such knowledge is slowly accumulating in fields such as neurophysiology, psychology, mental hygiene and sociology, remote from the pressures and practical needs of the operating agencies of training. In psychology, for example, there has been real progress in formulating the principles governing rat maze learning and human rote-learning of short lists of artificial words. But only small and

scattered effort is directed at principles which are central to problems of education.

Limitations on Satisfactory Progress:

a. In the operating agencies and institutions the problems are clearly recognized, but the workers are usually occupied with service demands for immediate results: marital adjustment of this person, removing a neurotic symptom, teaching arithmetic, building cargo ships, selling savings bonds. Frequently the urgency of the immediate problem so mobilizes the resources of the organization involved that the necessary longer term view cannot be taken.

b. Many of the problems in the area will be best served by an interdisciplinary approach, and while the interdisciplinary attack is growing in some areas, it is not widespread.

Why are Other Forms of Support Ineffective?

The major sources of support for research in such problems are the school systems, the universities and the government. School systems are of necessity service oriented, not research inclined, and are resistant to change. Universities suffer to some extent from service orientation but have the additional handicaps of limited funds and disciplinary departmentalization which is a factor biasing heavily toward a fragmentary approach. Government support is limited by the military orientation, the vagaries of politics, and the bureaucratically rigid necessity for short-term answers in research operations. In certain phases of this problem government agencies are peculiarly vulnerable to charges of promoting propaganda.

What Could the Ford Foundation do?

The foundation is subject to no short-term demands and should be able to provide the necessary impetus toward long-range social objectives not otherwise possible. By discriminating use of funds it could foster the interdisciplinary combination of basic research and practical operations which is now so lacking.

Methods:

The foundation could maximize its effectiveness by selecting promising cross-discipline projects, urging integrative project areas, and rewarding boldness in the more static areas.

Support research teams associated with operating agencies such as public school systems, teacher-training institutions, community welfare agencies.

Promote and support interdisciplinary research on the factors in behavior modification. Promising leads now exist in psychoanalytic concepts, in concepts of group dynamics, and in newer concepts of the development of capacities.

Time:

This should be a continuing effort as a program, but any project should be able to produce useful results in 5 years. Evaluation would be in terms of demonstration that a socially desired modification of human behavior could be achieved in greater degree or with greater efficiency (less time, effort or cost).