A Challenge To Education

The current critics of education are quite different from those of a decade ago. After Sputnik, the demand was for a more technically skilled people — so the schools responded with more science, more math, more homework — more of the same. And a growing emphasis on social adjustment seemed to come to an abrupt halt. The new critics of education have not been attacking education on its academic impotence, but rather its mindlessness, as Charles Silberman has expressed it — the lack of understanding of the long-term purposes of education and its effects on children.

As much as educators have talked about the whole child — they have never really educated the whole child, according to critics. Children have been processed through the system, measured and labeled according to accepted values, not taking into account their individual needs and differences. Our school systems have often suppressed the feelings and emotions of children, and destroyed their creativity in order to turn out a "product" at each grade level. There was a time when a product with specific marketable skills was needed for a vocation. Now we need more broadly educated people — capable of adjusting to a changing labor market and capable of solving problems — not just fulfilling assignments. Now we see education as a life-long process that does not begin and end in the school. The responsibility of CHALLENGE (Cont'd on page 2)

Parents Becoming Involved

An effort to directly involve parents in the education of their children is now underway at the Maxfield Elementary School in St. Paul. This may prove to be a valuable model for new approaches in education, though it is too early yet to draw more than short term inferences from the experience. The enthusiasm shared by the St. Paul school staff and faculty, the parents of Maxfield School children, and CURA Coordinator William L. Wilson for their joint project to make an "educational team" of the home and school, indicate that they are working in a direction of some promise.

Parents and teachers of Maxfield Elementary School children were invited in May of 1970 to participate in a series of four workshops, at the behest of Dr. Norma Jean Anderson, Consultant for Intercultural Education in the St. Paul schools. Forty volunteer parents joined with volunteer teachers from each grade K-6 to form writing teams to describe the content of the curriculum for each grade level. The parents were paid an honorarium by CURA — the teachers were paid by the St. Paul schools. The workshop sessions were valuable in structuring an exchange between parents and teachers, which in turn led to the delineation of the areas of concern for the manual. Because of the vast number of questions raised in these discussions, it PARENTS (Cont'd on page 5)
Dr. Frank Wilderson, Professor and Associate Dean in the College of Education and CURA Coordinator, spent the academic year 1969 – 1970 in the inner city communities of Detroit and Chicago to study the performance of Afro-American children in the home, community and school environments. His purpose: "to develop a strategy for the systematic progress of teacher-training, curriculum development and research relating to the education of Afro-American and other minority group children and youth in urban environments." The research effort was funded by salary money from CURA and the College of Education of the University of Minnesota, with support money from the Ford Foundation for travel to Detroit, Chicago, and Oakland, California.

The initial phase of this study tested the feasibility of using mothers from low-income families as participant-observers in the study of pupil behavior both at school and at home. After some unsatisfactory experimentation with subjective observation and reporting, the parents were trained to use tape recorders. When parents reported a suitable level of efficiency in the use of the instruments, they were requested to make periodic observations of their own children at home. During the second phase of the study parents were deployed to make observations of teachers and pupil interaction in seven inner-city Detroit schools. The research team went with the parents on these observation visits and helped them in the development of behavior matrices summarizing their observations.

In Chicago the same approach was attempted, but after some initial effort it became apparent that these mothers would be too involved in their own instructional training in basic literacy to devote the time to master the techniques that had been developed. It would, however, be probable that observational skills could be developed in these parents, in spite of their low level of reading ability. According to Dr. Wilderson, "they showed no lack of judgement, no lack of intellectual keenness – and I'm sure they would be well trained observers if we could develop an oral method of training."

BLACK CHILDREN (Cont'd on page 3)
BLACK CHILDREN (from page 2)

Dr. Wilderson observed the Detroit and Chicago minority communities to be different from the typical Minneapolis and St. Paul minority communities in the following respects:

- Improved accessibility to the administration of neighborhood schools, and regional and central school boards.
- Increased community “watchdog” activity in reference to the hygienic handling of minority group children in school.
- Advanced forms of militancy in reference to curriculum modification, expansion, and deletion of content or processes deemed harmful to the motivation and self-concept of minority group pupils.
- Suspicion of the intent, ability, and moral commitment of the University or teacher-training program to provide personnel for their schools who are committed to the development of excellence in the pupils they are to serve.

Both the Detroit and Chicago communities exhibited a low information level concerning the pattern of teacher-pupil interaction and pupil-pupil interaction which characterized the school environment. But there was also a willingness to plan with college of education faculty, provided such planning included the community interest at the earliest stages. Because these communities have been able to exercise power to restrict University training efforts in their schools, there has resulted less encroachment on the lives of the pupils through unplanned research sprawl.

Most urban communities are not without their problems and hopes when it comes to using college and university resources in the upgrading of their schools. Some of the problems in university-community relationships are obvious. Others could be determined only after a careful evaluation of the real living styles within each of these communities — and it appears that such evaluations are seldom conducted. Educational personnel are often willing to provide a system of services for individuals of whom they have no knowledge, but when trouble develops within the system they insist that the trouble originates with the child or with his family. In some communities there is a strong suspicion that neighboring universities are more interested in defending a position for campus expansion than they are in providing the best education for Black pupils where they happen to live.

BLACK CHILDREN (Cont’d on page 4)

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INDIAN EDUCATION
in the Minneapolis Public Schools

Since the formation of the Indian Advisory Board to the Minneapolis Public Schools, attention to the Indian youth in the school system has increased to a point where it is nearly impossible to meet the burgeoning demands of teachers and administrators for Indian materials and special programs.

The school system now has an Indian Consultant on its Urban Affairs staff, seven certified Indian teachers teaching full time, and some 30 Indian Aides in those schools with a high Indian student enrollment. Additional support for the strengthening of Indian identity and shared understanding of Indian culture and values is being realized through the broad range of programs funded through Titles I and III of the Education Act, as well as OEO, HEW and private foundations. The Indian Consultant to the Minneapolis Schools, Ted Mahto, estimates that the Minneapolis school system makes in-kind contributions totaling $200,000 per year to various Indian projects and programs including:

- the development of audio-visual materials depicting Indian culture which are supportive of Indian education
- the training of school librarians, through a University program, in the use of Indian literature and materials
- the continual development of new curriculum materials for all grade levels
- two “pocket” schools now in operation to provide a more flexible and comfortable setting for 35 Indian youth who find regular school unsatisfactory
- the Indian tutorial program, which is administered through the same office as the Neighborhood Youth Corps, and now has 30 Junior High Indian youth tutoring elementary Indian children
- a Chippewa language and culture course added to the curriculum at Phillips Junior High
- the formation of an Indian youth organization who call themselves True American Native Students—a positive step taken by the students themselves
- the proud and unmistakable display of two totem poles—one at South High, one at Phillips
- a contribution of $25,000 from the Freedom From Hunger Foundation to the school system to be used for Indian programs, the disbursement of which will be directed by Indian parents in the community.

"Perhaps the greatest contribution to Indian youth, says Mr. Mahto, has been made by individual teachers to individual Indian youth or to groups of them. There is a tremendous commitment by these people, both in the school system and out, to do something to improve opportunities for Indian youth. In the past 3 years the Minneapolis Public Schools have moved a great distance in the area of Indian education. They had to, because they were playing catch-up ball and playing it under the dissatisfied eyes of miracle seekers. Further success is expected, if greater commitment and input is made by the Indian people themselves — and especially parents. This is the key! This city and this state will move ahead in the area of Indian Education as long as Indian people are involved in decision making and as long as they can participate comfortably and willingly."

Editors note: see also “Minnesota’s Urban Indians”; CURA Reporter Volume 1, Number 3, October 1970.
BLACK CHILDREN (from page 3)

Although the problems appear to vary to some degree with each specific community, a central theme heard repeatedly at community meetings, Black club meetings, storefront organizations, and the like, is that the expectations of him (the Black child) are not those which stem from his natural and normal environmental interactions, but rather are superimposed from an alien and disinterested source.

Based on the Detroit and Chicago studies, Dr. Wilderson observes that the keys to relative success in developing effective educational programs in minority urban communities are:

- Extensive community pressure on teachers, principals, and central office administrators so that unplanned and uncoordinated student teaching, doctoral research or central office survey and testing cannot occur.
- Coordination of college training, research, and development activities with localized community planning and advocacy groups.
- High involvement of elementary and secondary pupils in out-side-of-school ethnic-oriented cultural and political activities.
- Heavy community group involvement in uncovering of pupil grievances and in mediating or representing pupils in their disputes with school building and central office personnel.
- A strong interest in mobilizing to defeat population dispersal programs which would weaken the power base for the attack on problems of central importance to pupils residing in the inner-city communities.

PROGRAMS EMERGING FROM RESEARCH

As an extension of this project, further study of Black children and their interactions with parents and siblings and other significant adults in their natural home and school environments has been undertaken.

Two research students in Educational Psychology from the University of Minnesota (who were involved in the Berkeley-Oakland aspect of last year’s study) have been collaborating with faculty from the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta, from Syracuse University and from the University of California in planning a research and demonstration effort concerning Black family socialization and education in selected neighborhoods. Dr. John Johnson, Vice Provost at Syracuse University, Dr. Andrew Billingsley, formerly Vice Chancellor at the University of California and now Vice President at Howard University, and Dr. Wilderson have submitted a proposal to NIMH/USOE and DOL for funding. They hope to coordinate this project through the Institute of the Black World, thereby, in Dr. Wilderson’s words, “setting up a research outpost for students in predominantly white Universities who would like to have access to predominantly Black populations for purposes of study and service.”

CURA is helping with the compilation of a complete literature survey of experimental studies in this area as an adjunct of the final research proposal. The goal of this pilot effort will be to produce a document which can be used by college and University classes now in helping graduate students and teachers to know and understand some of the work that has been done on Black experiences in education in this country. Students from Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota, and from Black Studies Departments at the University of Minnesota, Syracuse, Howard, and the University of California at Berkeley, will work on the research design. Support from CURA for several students will permit them to do their field work and share in planning with other project participants.

Some of the concepts of parent involvement, behavior observation, parent-child interaction and early stimulation efforts are now being tested in the Experimental Pre-School at the Way University in Minneapolis. This project has been initiated with CURA staff, and is under review by the Department of Special Education, the State Department of Education and the Minneapolis Public Schools. Funds will be sought under Titles I & III to continue this center for early childhood education for minority children.

Special Elementary Education for the Disadvantaged (SEED) was initiated at the University of Minnesota in July — also as an outgrowth of Dr. Wilderson’s research tour. The College of Education provided funds to bring Dr. James Janetz from the University of California at Berkeley to demonstrate the use of inquiry training methods for the teaching of higher mathematics concepts to inner-city minority group children. CURA and the College of Education are jointly funding Professor Thomas Post of the College of Education to head the SEED project. Harvey Keynes, Hillel Gershenson & Leonard Shapiro, IT professors, are being supplied a small stipend by CURA to conduct these special mathematics classes at Willard Elementary School in North Minneapolis. The 30 students for this pilot project have been selected by the mathematics consultant of the Minneapolis Public Schools.

The SEED goals are:

a. To improve the self-image of the culturally disadvantaged student.

b. To enable more culturally disadvantaged youngsters to go to college.

c. To raise the expectations of the teachers of culturally disadvantaged students.

d. To identify hidden ability.

e. To improve the culturally disadvantaged child’s ability to organize and "articulate" difficult, abstract ideas.

f. To destroy popular stereotypes of minority student inferiority.

g. To attract disadvantaged white children to segregated, predominantly Negro schools.

h. To gain further knowledge of the limits of the elementary school child’s ability to comprehend advanced, abstract concepts.

It has been said that the measure of a society is in the way in which it educates its young. Our Society may at last be making some significant progress toward better educational opportunities for all of its children, stimulated by the special efforts of Black educators.
Experiences of a "FREE SCHOOL"

The Community School is an experimental high school that has been operating in St. Paul since this past September. It is located in the Twin Cities Friend's Meeting House, 295 Summit Avenue. Forty-seven students, age thirteen to eighteen, from all over the Twin Cities area attend the school. The school is financed on a tuition/ability-to-pay basis. No student has been turned down for lack of money. The school is staffed by two full-time teachers and about a dozen regular part-time teachers, plus a varying number of other volunteers and resource people. As a legal, private high school, the Community School can grant diplomas to its students.

But why was the School started, ponders Larry Olds, instructor in secondary education at the University of Minnesota and one of the School's founders.

"Part of the answer is simple—it was because we wanted a better place to be for ourselves. We wanted to integrate our lives, our work and our living. We are idealists; we want utopia. (I am tired of talking to people who are practical. I want to fill my world with dreamers; those who don't just ask why, but ask why not.) The rest of the answer gets lost in rhetoric that often seems very unimportant. We do share some assumptions about teachers and learners, we share a critical view of society, and we share a search for better ways. (I was presumptuous. I wanted to call the School "Better Ways".)

In the beginning most of us thought of teaching and classes; we organized a rich variety of classes—English, reading, psychology, anthropology, weaving, ecology, algebra, urban encounter, modern dance, oral history, German, French, media, and so on. And the classes changed when the students didn't come. Urban Encounter became Probings, Anthropology became Questions I, Science became Challenge I. But students still chose other things. They chose to sleep in the morning; to do leather work at home; to visit other schools; to play soccer, touch football, and broomball; wrestle in the leaves; listen to music; watch movies; listen to speakers on dozens of topics — on labor, law, the occult, and on film. They read, ate weird vegetarian lunches, and prepared to spend the month of January in Mexico. (It is often said about free schools that it takes time to work out one's freedom; to get over the past programming, and to be ready to run, to leap, and to soar.)

There has been lots of activity. Students organized a fund raising dinner and organized another school; they made candles and bread to sell; they entertained another forty visitors; they attended another heavy unrewarding Monday morning meeting; they went through evaluation interviews; there was a week-end retreat; another overnight retreat; there was fear and trouble and hope. It flowed together with more new students, a new organizational plan, some reading groups. Someone asked for work on reading skill and math skills. It seems clear that there is learning, that students feel as though they have a stake in what they do; that they feel better about themselves as they choose for themselves how to spend their days. We are optimistic and hopeful and uncertain.

The School is changing. Twenty-four students and six staff will have spent five weeks together on a bus in Mexico. It will have to change because of that. It will also change because the people that make up the school will have in part worked FREE SCHOOL (Cont'd on page 6)

PARENTS (from page 1)

was decided that the writing teams would produce a series of manuals.

The first manual, released in October 1970, stated the charge to the writing teams as two-fold:

- What can parents do to help in the education of their children?
- What basic knowledge is the child supposed to acquire at each grade level?

Close to one-hundred Maxfield parents were interviewed during the summer of 1970, and their concerns are discussed in the manuals—to be published from October 1970 through May 1971. The October issue includes information about the special services offered through the St. Paul school system, including speech correction, special learning disabilities instruction, talking typewriters, health care, psychological services, counseling and social work. The November issue introduces parents to the broad concepts discussed in the social sciences and the physical and biological sciences. A section of the November issue deals with communication skills, including mathematics as a symbolic language, and study skills for all levels from I-VI. Succeeding editions of the Home-School Manual will discuss other subject areas and will further treat the questions and response of parents about the education of their youngsters.

An all-school training workshop is now being planned as a result of response to the first manual. All parents from the 262 families in the Maxfield district will be encouraged to participate in the 20 hours of training. The instructors will include 14 staff members from the Maxfield faculty, 4 University upper division or graduate students from the College of Education, and 14 SLD teachers from the St. Paul schools. The parents will be prepared essentially as Teaching Assistants are prepared to assist teachers in the classroom. These training workshops will replace parent conferences and PTA meetings.

This developing relationship between home and school is not only a means of improving the education of the youngsters in school, but it will result in a cadre of skilled teacher aides who may at some later time be hired as auxiliary staff. Analysis of the long range effects of the Maxfield project will be made by the St. Paul schools and University staff and students in education. But in the short range the reaction of parents and students has already demonstrated the value of the experiment.
FREE SCHOOL (from page 5)
through their freedom, released their long
pent-up energy, and come to a real
organic need to know more things, to
create, to build. It is their own need. It
may be instilled into them from the
values of their parents, their society, from
the media, and from other teachers, but
now finally it is becoming their own. The
Community School is a school because,
quite simply, learning happens there."

The Community School — and others
like it — remain on shaky ground, both
financially and in general public
acceptance. But the School is sustained
by a core of committed people, such as
Larry Olds, Tom O’Connell, David and
Marja Hilfiker — and by the students
themselves. Not only has a second school
been started since last year, but the
number of serious inquiries to join the
School can be counted in the hundreds. A
movement has begun in South
Minneapolis to persuade the Minneapolis
Board of Education to provide for a free
school option within the public system.
And it appears that such an option may
become a reality available to all young
people in the not-too-distant future.