

↑
SOME GUIDELINES FOR THE ICOC PROGRAM ON EDUCATION

The ICOC Program on Education

1. Must be a basis for organizing the Inner City Community on a long-term basis and not just for specific demonstrations, although obviously such demonstrations can be and should be undertaken as part of the movement to organize the community. Demonstrations will usually center around specific demands for reform or improvement, e.g. increases in staff and special services, reduced class sizes, more textbooks, removal of a particular teacher or administrator, etc. The program, however,
2. must attack the fundamentals on which the present system is organized with the essential perspective of Black Power as the only solution. It cannot be answered with the argument that "We are doing the best we can but we just don't have enough money or enough teachers."
3. must be the basis for organizing: a) black teachers; b) black students (including students preparing to become teachers); and black parents, arming all of these philosophically and organizationally for attack on the present system and inspiring black parents, teachers and student teachers particularly with a vision of what is possible in their teaching and training of children.

No extensive research is needed to prove that education of black children in inner city schools is inferior, that classrooms in inner city schools are overcrowded, that they lack the services and facilities of suburban schools, that texts in public schools are racist, that the reading level in inner city schools is far below national levels, that the teaching level in inner city schools is below par, that inner city schools are for the most part custodial institutions. All this has been recognized and documented not only by civil rights organizations but from top to bottom of the school system.* The only ones who will not admit these

*See, e.g., Report of the U. S. Commissioner of Education July 1, 1966; Testimony of the U. S. Commissioner of Education before the House Sub-Committee on Education, August 24, 1966; Irving Sloan, The Negro in Modern American History Textbooks.

self-evident truths are the teachers, administrators and school boards - for whom the admission would mean professional suicide.

The Fundamental Question is WHY and WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Essentially the present system of education in inner city schools is based on the concept that the black child is so "culturally deprived" or "culturally disadvantaged" that he can't learn. Boards of education, colleges of education, principals and teachers all drum this into the heads of teachers, student teachers, students, parents and children in books, lectures, pamphlets, workshops, films. This is the prevailing concept that has been created by the educational power structure or bureaucracy to justify its failure to meet the new situation that has been created over the last dozen years by the flight of middle-class whites to the suburbs and the demand for equal education by the black inner city community which now dominates the central city. It is assumed that slum children cannot learn the way normal children learn. This is the theory, the underlying philosophy which expresses and reinforces the racism in the whole educational power structure and provides every teacher with an excuse for her own failure to teach or her teaching on a low level. You hear it hourly and daily in the unceasing complaints of teachers and principals against the children and their homes and families. It is usually expressed in the guise of sympathy for the children. "What can you expect? Look at Debra's or Ronald's home and mother." It is supposed to be liberalism or understanding of the school community. Actually it is only another way of saying that black children are culturally inferior. In other words, it is thinly-disguised racism. Yet large numbers of black teachers have accepted this theory as gospel truth - principally because they have had no forceful answer to it.

The fact is that in comparison to the rural child or immigrant child of yesterday, the inner city child today is objectively culturally advanced rather than culturally deprived. The child from an American farm or a Sicilian fishing village or an Irish potato field of yesterday had much less familiarity with technical or worldly matters than the inner city child of today who has been brought up on a diet of TV, movies, radio, motor cars, etc. Yet the child from the European or American hinterland of yesterday was expected to learn, expected to learn and did learn in school. Essentially this was 1) because he was regarded as culturally endowed rather than culturally deprived. The American farm which he came from was glorified as part of the great American past. Or, if he came from Europe, he was regarded as coming from a great civilization with a rich religious and cultural heritage. Even if he came from the backwoods of Eastern Europe, he was identified in his own mind and in the minds of his teachers with Roman civilization or Florentine art or Shakespeare or Columbus or even with the Pilgrims who landed on Plymouth Rock - because he was white like them. 2) He also knew that if he applied himself in school, what he learned would equip him for a role at the top of American industry or American politics. Hence he had a motivation for learning and was given even more motivation by his teachers, the surrounding society and the whole school system.

Today, it is the system of education which is culturally deprived and which is culturally depriving the black child, not the child who is culturally deprived.

The American system of education is culturally deprived because essentially it is the creation of a bigoted white middle-class, convinced that Western civilization is the only great civilization and Western democracy is the highest form of government, believing that this nation is the master nation and the white race

is the master race, committed to individualism and materialism, socially irresponsible and self-seeking, grounded on the most murderous racism known to human history and now ready to resort to the most barbaric weapons in order to protect the American way of life and its high material standards against the revolution of the world under-class.

It is this system of education in turn which is culturally depriving the black child of background and motivation just as systematically as the Founding Fathers robbed the black child's forefathers of their history and culture. The black child is being deprived, as the whole system is deprived, of knowledge of the African past and of the fact that the four great Ps of human culture - painting, prayer, planting and paper - originated in Africa. The system refuses to acknowledge that the slave labor of black children's forefathers actually provided the primitive accumulation of capital on which this country's industrial development was founded and for which no reparations have ever been paid.

Motivation is interpreted chiefly in terms of methods - making the subject more interesting. It is never understood and applied in fundamental social terms as the imparting of a social perspective, i.e. the imparting by the system to those being educated of the conviction that they are going to control their own destiny and that their chief task is to prepare themselves for this control over their own destiny and for rule over a technologically-developed society. The Boards of Education, the administration, the teachers can't impart such a historic conviction because they don't have it. They believe instead in the permanence of White Power.

The usual motivation - "You must have an education to get a job" - is more a threat than a promise. Black children may not be able to express it in words but have a pretty good idea that the jobs for which they are supposedly preparing

themselves will be technologically obsolete by the time they are grown. They have after all been born into an age in which technological revolution is part of the air one breathes. Telling black kids that they must get an education to get a job is another way of saying that they can't control their own destiny because any kid who has been brought up in a black worker's home has learned from experience that the guy with just a job is a guy who is at the mercy of the man. In other words, so far as the kids are concerned, fundamentally a job is just a "slave."

The Only Way to Attack Such a System is in Terms of Fundamentals

1. Our aim must be to expose, attack, and root out the concept of the culturally deprived or culturally disadvantaged black child as a racist theory of black inferiority and to force all educators, experts and others who use the phrase or its more euphemistic equivalents to choke on it.

2. On the contrary, we must insist on a system of education which stresses the facts that black kids: a) are already a majority of the inner city school population in most major cities and should therefore be preparing themselves to rule the city. EDUCATION FOR BLACK CHILDREN MUST BE EDUCATION FOR LEADERSHIP. The stress should be on the political and social responsibilities for which our children should be preparing themselves.

b) have cultural advantages over white children because they are not as crippled by white individualism, because by virtue of their systematic oppression they have a past and present of fighting for social freedom, because they are part of the world black majority now in revolt and destined to rule the world in the 21st century, and because black people in America have created the only American culture (jazz and popular music) which has any standing on a world scale.

c) have physical advantages, as demonstrated by their key role in major sports, such as boxing, basketball, baseball and football.

3. The system of education must recognize the role of dialect and geography in the language habits of our children and teach standard English not as culturally superior to the language of the community but as a different language.

4. Social promotion must be stopped at once. It is only clearing seats in the classroom for successive groups of educationally deprived children and promoting them from the classroom into the front lines of Vietnam. Instead there shall be standardized tests for all grade levels which every child must pass before he is promoted. Non-promotion shall be recognized for what it is, evidence not of the child's failure but of the failure of the teacher, the administration and the school system.

5. Special Education teachers shall be reapportioned among public schools in proportion to the inner city school population. In terms of capacity for and interest in learning and in maturation rate, children in most inner city classrooms are no different from children in any classroom. There is the same curve of slow and fast learners at both extremes and the majority in the middle who are neither one nor the other. But the shortage of special education teachers and classrooms in inner city schools has meant that the emotionally disturbed child, who in a white suburban school would be put into a special class, is kept in the regular class and allowed to disrupt it. This reinforces the racist conviction of the teacher that black children are half-savage (culturally deprived) anyway and turns her into a custodian.

The first need is to organize organizations of black parents and teachers and of black students on the basis of these guidelines for the purpose of promoting this program through educational brochures, neighborhood meetings, petitions,

demonstrations, etc. The ultimate objective of these organizations should be the mobilization of the black community to place black men and women with these convictions on the Board of Education and as principals and teachers in inner city schools. On the road to achieving this objective and dependent upon their strength in particular communities, these organizations should organize actions in relation to conditions and administration in specific schools or school districts, not only protesting against these conditions and administrations but demanding community boards of control over these schools or school districts (as in the I. S. 201 protest in Harlem). There is no lack of incidents and situations to dramatize the basic cultural deprivation to which black children are being daily subjected in the public schools. The need is for organizations who understand the fundamental basis of this cultural deprivation and are ready to mobilize the community to attack it and the system of which it is an integral part.