



REPORT ON THE PHILOSOPHY AND MECHANICS OF THE URBAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF PHILADELPHIA

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The Urban Education Committee was formed to determine what, if anything, the Delaware Valley Chapter of the Association of Computing Machinery could do to help place the disadvantaged into entry-level jobs in the computing industry.

The following subcommittees were formed:

1. *Counseling Committee*

The responsibility of this committee was to educate organizations interfacing with the disadvantaged to the wide range of opportunities in the computing field.

2. *Finance Committee*

The Finance Committee had the responsibility of acquiring the funds to support the endeavors undertaken by the Urban Education Committee.

3. *Training and Curriculum Committee*

This committee was given the responsibility of defining the objectives of the training aspects of the program and producing the curriculum and training materials required to implement the selected program.

This paper deals with the philosophy and the implementation of that philosophy formulated by the Training and Curriculum Committee.

The Training and Curriculum Committee canvassed the computer users and manufacturers to determine what training would produce the best results in terms of jobs for the disadvantaged. The information collected from this study indicated that training computer operators would produce the desired result.

The Training and Curriculum Committee also solicited advice from various organizations already working with the disadvantaged in order to establish a link with the ghetto and to learn the proper approach to teaching the disadvantaged.

The conclusions formulated from this investigation were as follows:

1. The chosen endeavor must be *successful*.
2. That it is very difficult to establish a link with the ghetto independently; and that an established organization must be used as the communication link between the Urban Education Committee and the disadvantaged.
3. That word of mouth communication from the disadvantaged exposed to a successful program provides the most effective link.
4. That the organization responsible for a given program must never lose sight of its original goals.

5. That motivation alone was not enough to be successful; that the resources and talents of an organization must be defined so that the endeavor has a chance for success based on the organization's capabilities.

Armed with the information collected from the computing industry and the organizations working with the disadvantaged, the Training and Curriculum Committee set out to define a course of action.

The first conclusion reached by the Training and Curriculum Committee was that the Urban Education Committee did not have the resources required to effect a change in the hiring policies of the establishment toward the disadvantaged. This conclusion dictated that the effort should be placed in effecting a change in the attitudes of the disadvantaged by opening the door to the benefits of our society through an effective training program. If the Urban Education Committee could, in fact, successfully produce an effective employee from disadvantaged students, it would then indirectly change the attitudes of the establishment toward hiring the disadvantaged.

The next step taken was to define the attributes required to be an effective computer operator. This was accomplished by interviewing programmers, operators and installation managers. The conclusions reached at this point defined the Urban Education Committee's goals.

The next problem to be solved was how does the Urban Education Committee motivate the students. It was determined that the UEC did not have the expertise to function as psychologist. It was also evident that a person entering such a course must have a certain amount of motivation already. It was concluded that our problem then was not so much to create motivation but to enhance the motivation that already existed. Motivation is closely tied to self-esteem and a sense of personal dignity. Self-esteem is fostered by a sense of personal accomplishment and, therefore, the curriculum must be designed in such a way that the course itself provided obtainable goals which would instill in the student a sense of personal progress and accomplishment.

The curriculum was designed around a series of tests which had to be performed by a student *without help*.

The Training and Curriculum Committee also recognized that in many cases a student would have social problems which might interfere with his ability to function to his full capacity. How was this problem to be solved without diluting the caliber of the graduating students? It was concluded that the social aspects of a student's life must be handled separately from the academic requirements of the program. It must be impressed upon the student that any social problems that he might be experiencing cannot be an excuse for doing poorly. This conclusion dictated a certain relationship between the teacher and the students. The teacher must see himself as a teacher and not as a substitute mother. The teacher must be authoritative in his approach to teaching in the same way all teachers who teach well must be in order to operate a well-ordered and effective class.

This required that the teachers be paid so that a reasonable amount of control over the teachers could be exercised.

This approach was, in at least two ways, quite different from most other attempts to teach the disadvantaged. The mother-image relationship was completely abandoned as a viable approach to the disadvantaged in that it tended to create an unrealistic attitude in the student toward his responsibilities to himself and to the society. The social aspects of a student's life, regardless of how un-

pleasant, must be handled in an adult way and not be used as an excuse for under-achievement.

In effect, what is being contended here is that the training of the disadvantaged must be as close to the accepted standards of training in any other area with the one exception that the curriculum be designed to be relevant to the attitudes and level of education of the disadvantaged.

MECHANICS

Once the objectives of the Urban Education Committees training project were established, work commenced on the curriculum and the course structure. A teacher was obtained whose credentials adequately qualified him to teach the E.A.M. phase; he was also very concerned and sincere about doing his part in helping the disadvantaged. "Buddies" were solicited from the A.C.M. chapter to act as tutors and to provide guidance in any way possible. The call for buddies resulted in over 50 people responding. Two counselors were selected; their function was to act as an interface between the students, the buddies and the Training and Curriculum Committee. (Negroes were selected to allow student identification.)

A curriculum was drafted which contained lecture, training and review sessions, competence level tests and field trips. A meeting was held to review the course structure and curriculum. Noteworthy was the rejection of the philosophy presented. The rejection directly reflected the establishment's attitude toward training the disadvantaged. They neither understood the reasons for the competence level tests nor the proposed class attitude, which was that of a normal regimented academic environment.

The competence level test is a hands-on test to demonstrate whether the student understood the lessons and could put what he had learned into practice.

Prior to the 10th class meeting the Training and Curriculum Committee was informed that the class was ready for advanced instruction in board wiring, a subject which was not included in the adopted curriculum. The Training and Curriculum Committee realized that no student could have attained the desired level of skill in that period of time. A simplified competence level test was prepared which included sorting, collating and listing which required minimal skills to pass. All the students FAILED!

Why did the students fail when the instructor, students and counselors were all highly motivated and concerned? The instructor followed neither the curriculum nor the philosophy. But, of most importance, was that both the instructor and the counselors presented a MOTHER image to the students. The primary ingredient lost to the instructor was objectivity. The students had been nursed through problems rather than learning from errors or mistakes. As a result classes were then altered to a workshop format and a series of competence level tests was given. The students achieved the desired level and completed the E.A.M. phase in six class meetings. We considered this a demonstration of the validity of the approach.

Prior to the beginning of the second phase, both instructors were counseled on student-teacher relationship and the proper testing attitude. The instructors also reviewed the curriculum. The class format was altered; the Wednesday class was devoted to lectures, and the Saturday class contained hands-on-training, lectures and workshop sessions. At this point it is significant to state that the coun-

seled instructors did sway back to the mother attitude when applying the competence level tests. However, this was immediately rectified. We strongly suggest that training programs such as that of the Urban Education Committees have an overseer who will not lose his objectivity.

The philosophy of treating the students as young men, no different than any one else, has proven to be successful; not one student has dropped out of the program. However, we have had to drop one student. The young man was intelligent, and his problem was not parental, financial or racial. His problem was a poor attitude. The young man was given special guidance and was tutored, all of which he rejected in one way or another.

At another point in the program the Training and Curriculum Committee felt it would have to drop another student because of absences. Upon investigation it was obvious that the young man had severe social problems. The young man was tutored and provided with counsel both from his school and the Urban Education Committee and has gone on to successfully complete the course.

The two above cases were the most severe.

The Urban Education Committee realized at the beginning of the program that the committee could not go into the ghetto and institute any great changes. But what could be accomplished was to have a successful program, live up to our obligations and let the people we trained convey the desired message. Of the initial 20 students, there are 19 Urban Education Committee trained computer operators working in and around the Philadelphia area today.