

DEVELOPING DESIRABLE OCCUPATIONAL ATTITUDES
AMONG THE DISADVANTAGED

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A basic assumption underlying most vocational education programs is that the development of job skills is of primary importance. Another assumption is that all vocational students or trainees possess more or less the same occupational orientation. These assumptions may not be true. If they are not true, then, there is a very important implication for vocational educators. It could mean that primary emphasis in vocational education should be placed on developing desirable employment attitudes rather than on developing job skills among disadvantaged persons.

A look at recent attitudinal research sheds considerable light on the problem. Neale and Proshek (1:1967) noted that ". . .disadvantaged youth possess a constellation of attitudes that severely handicap their school performance." "Some of the handicaps were low evaluation of self, low levels of aspiration, and negative feelings about school and school work." Tuckerman (2:1967) also noted that ". . .culturally deprived youth had unfavorable attitudes toward self, others and society."

Edington (3:1970) pointed out that poor (low income) people ". . .have the feeling that they are trapped and that there are no promising choices open to them in solving their problems." He further indicated that, ". . .disadvantaged youth bring certain attitudes to school with them." Williams (4:1970) reported that, ". . .the educational efforts of schools are frequently ineffective because they are not geared to the values and norms of disadvantaged persons living in rural areas."

The conclusions by Neale, Proshek, Tuckerman, Edington, and Williams strongly suggest that vocational educators need to alter their philosophy concerning the primary emphasis for vocational programs for disadvantaged persons. Present programs need to be altered or new ones planned before we can effectively deal with the needs of disadvantaged youths.

The environment is the greatest contributor to attitudinal differences between advantaged and disadvantaged youth. Some researchers refer to the superior environmental activities of advantaged persons as the "hidden curriculum." Deutsch (5:1965) found that ". . .the disadvantaged homes contain no hidden curriculum, as do many advantaged homes, this often leads to a discontinuity with school experiences."

The concept of a hidden curriculum is of considerable importance in studying the attitudes of disadvantaged youth. Phipps (6:1970) reported ". . .in developing a vocational program for severely disadvantaged families or in helping adults and children in the families to develop plans, attitudes, motivations, and skills for the world of work, the educator cannot assume much input from past or present leisure time activities." The lack of leisure time activity input means to a large degree that the youths had no hidden curriculum.

Based on the work of Deutsch and Phipps, it would appear that vocational educators must look for ways and means of providing hidden curricula for disadvantaged youth. The classroom walls must be extended into the community. Programs designed to develop desirable occupational attitudes must be provided at all ages and in forms acceptable to the disadvantaged persons. Otherwise, efforts to develop job skills will yield fewer dividends.

Vocational educators frequently presume that occupational status is a goal of their students. They theorize that increased occupational status results in increased economic position which, in turn, results in increased desire for higher occupational status, etc. The questions which arise are, at what point should vocational educators become involved and in what ways.

To increase occupational status, training in an occupation is necessary. To induce disadvantaged persons to change their attitudes toward the world of work and their environment also requires special training. In other words, occupational training must be accompanied by new programs designed to alter the attitudes of disadvantaged persons. Hopefully, the alteration of attitudes will be reflected in an increased desire for higher levels of occupational status.

Williams, Phipps, and Thomas (7:1970) have observed that in order for the rural disadvantaged ". . .to break the vicious circle of poverty being passed from one generation to the next, family members must be educated to the point where they can compete for adequate employment in our society." Training an individual for an occupation does not necessarily guarantee success in that occupation. Competition for employment exists and the disadvantaged youth must be prepared mentally as well as manually to reach higher levels of occupational status.

The attitude of being trapped in a disadvantaged atmosphere was studied by Williams (4:1970). In the study, severely disadvantaged families differed from randomly selected non-disadvantaged families in their degree of consensus about existing community life in the depressed rural area. The cohesiveness of these families studied was very low. Williams found that ". . .cohesiveness among people in a community increases group power and the chances of successfully gained improvement for their family and community." It follows that the chances of improvement of many disadvantaged is very poor.

Project REDY (Rural Education for Disadvantaged Youth) conducted at the University of Illinois (1970) studies the problems of severely disadvantaged families in depressed rural areas. This program was goal orientated and found several very important facts concerning the families in the study.

Thomas, Phipps, and Williams, (8:1970) evaluated the outcomes of Project REDY. They were able to draw several conclusions which have significance for future study

They concluded that by ". . .improving disadvantaged family members' outlook on life, their morale, results in the improvements in the physical environmental conditions of the home and its surroundings." This conclusion ties in with a previously presented concept. This leaves one to conclude that there are numerous things to be done to help alleviate the predicament of rural disadvantaged youth.

A third and equally important conclusion was that "Involving the entire family in a vocationally orientated program designed to develop the capabilities of youth in an effective way of obtaining desired changes in the attitudes and aspirations of children and of gaining family support for children's desires."

In summary, vocational educators should become aware of the attitudes of disadvantaged youth. Many disadvantaged youth alienate themselves from normal school achievement. This is due to many factors. The "hidden curriculum" concept presented by Duetsch (5:1965) may account for a large part of this. The works by Neale, Proshek, Tuckerman, Edington, Phipps, Thomas and Williams presented other items of importance concerning the attitudes of disadvantaged youth. The research revealed a small segment of the total picture of attitudinal problems of disadvantaged youth. The major findings of this paper suggest that programs for disadvantaged youth in vocational education should be directed toward the improvement of attitudes.

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