

**Memorandum to  
The President**

**Subject:**

**A Plan of Action**

**For Remedial Education**

**(A follow-up on my memorandum  
of October 16, 1964.)**

**From James Farmer  
November 21, 1964**

In my previous memo to you (October 16, 1964) I suggested that CORE believes that it is possible, working with other organizations and private citizens, to provide literacy skills for a million Americans in an eighteen month period with an investment of \$30,000,000. I stressed the fact that CORE is an organization of volunteers, who are accepted and trusted within the communities most in need. Further, I stated that it is possible to perform this task in whatever buildings and facilities are available, using non-teachers to instruct with the Accelerated Progressive Choice Reading Program, developed by Dr. Myron Woolman of the Institute of Educational Research in Washington.

The fact that millions of Americans see the fruits of our rich, productive society and yet cannot taste those fruits is a violation of the right of all citizens to equal opportunity. Moreover, these millions of economically and socially disfranchised Americans represent an unstable and potentially explosive force within our society. From the point of view of simple justice, economic growth, and social stability, we must attack this problem with all available resources. The social advances made possible by the Civil Rights Act and the promise in the Economic Opportunities Act are like a menu presented to long-hungry diners. These legislative acts must be followed by something tangible or the very hopes they raise will stimulate further disillusionment and resentment. The problem infects every American community and action must be taken wherever the problem exists.

In considering the issue, I am convinced that CORE has only begun to make its contribution. We must help the disadvantaged develop literacy and job skills and a concomitant confidence in their future as Americans.

I have a deep conviction that CORE must participate actively at the community level, lending support to these important programs as they begin to function within our deprived communities. The dropouts, illiterates and the unemployed cannot be helped by law, buildings, money or good intentions. They distrust officials and schools, in whatever guise they appear, and they can only be brought into full and active participation in our society by people they trust using methods of training which are suited to their needs. Above all, there must be mutual confidence between the people who operate the programs and those to whom the training is given.

The prime fact of the war on poverty is that the trainee must not only enlist but actively participate if he is to learn. Learning, as you know, is a personal matter and requires both confidence in the teacher and a willingness to invest oneself in the process sufficiently to succeed. I am convinced that the next step is for organizations such as CORE to move forward into the national arena and if this important step is to succeed, to act as a catalyst for simplifying and accelerating the process of education and training.

Further, it is necessary for organizations such as CORE not only to participate in community education, but also to assist in developing the new educational methods and techniques required for community-action education, as contrasted with public education, which, to date, has been ineffective in coping with the problems rampant in our deprived communities.

While it is the responsibility of the schools to educate, it is our obligation to supplement that education where necessary and to reach those who have failed to respond to the schools. No one can reach the youth on the streets in quite the same manner as another youth or an adult who has come from the same background and environment. CORE feels strongly that the Negro protest organizations along with individual churches, local unions, social clubs and community groups have a unique role to play in motivating and educating those Americans who remain functionally illiterate. Our record shows that we have had astonishing success in motivating and training the very population that is most in need of inspiration, most in need of enrichment, most in need of literacy skills, most in need of jobs. We do not propose a program for non-whites alone. We propose to begin a campaign in which volunteers of all ages, backgrounds and races will be able to offer a unique learning experience to hundreds of thousands and even millions of disadvantaged and underprivileged persons.

We have in the field the structure for putting into effect a large scale literacy program. We have the methodology. With the proper funding we will be in a position to effect substantial literacy programs throughout the rural South and in hundreds of cities and towns. Through coordination of the efforts of private agencies and with the assistance of the federal government we believe we can make great strides toward the elimination of illiteracy in this great nation.

Our objective is to teach people to read and thus provide them with the underpinning required to go on to further educational and employment levels. But we have an even greater objective. Negroes and other members of depressed minority groups have been taught to reject their own potential. Those on the bottom have for their own self-protection become apathetic and lethargic: to try to advance is to be beaten down. Thus, millions of Americans have chosen to accept their inferior status. The militant civil rights campaigns of the past decade have awakened the sleeping aspirations of many of these sullen millions. For the first time we have brought the spark of

life into whole communities. While we have provided the awakening, we must now shift our programs so that we may provide the tools to translate these new-found aspirations into reality.

The ingredients necessary for the successful implementation of a literacy program which can provide reading skills and motivation for further growth are:

1. A population receptive to the idea of learning and self-advancement.
2. A technology which can provide the ability to advance reading skills at a substantial rate and which also has built-in self-motivating factors.
3. A large group of persons able to act as instructors.
4. A structure able to administer and supervise the program.
5. Community facilities available for implementing the program over a long period of time.
6. Funds.

#### Population

There is no need to dwell on the need or the receptivity of a large population. The statistical evidence is overwhelming. This has also been dealt with here and in the earlier memorandum.

#### Technology

The method developed by Dr. Myron Woolman appears to hold the best possibility for success. It is a programmed approach which has been designed for use by relatively untrained personnel. It incorporates the learning by teaching approach. The content of the reading material can be tailored to meet the peculiar requirements of the southern Negro child and adult, the ghettoized high school dropout or the Appalachian white, and it allows the student to advance as rapidly as his own capabilities permit. CORE has observed the method in operation in the field. Our staff was amazed at the interest, involvement, discipline

and motivation of both instructors and students.

Others who have studied Progressive Choice in practice attest to its striking ability to stimulate and hold the learner. Students almost unanimously ask to spend longer hours on the program than time permits. They take tremendous pride in their accomplishments and in their successes. We are thoroughly convinced that Accelerated Progressive Choice offers the best opportunity for non-teachers to reach and teach the educationally and socially deprived.

### Instructors

Many volunteer Literacy Instructors will be drawn from the dropout or potential dropout population itself. Retired teachers, housewives, student volunteers, church members and workers can also become volunteer Literacy Instructors.

The initial cadre of instructors will come from the active membership of the Congress of Racial Equality, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the churches. In many cases the instructors will recruit their own students. As students progress in the method they themselves will instruct others just entering the program. With CORE's extensive experience in the utilization of volunteers we will be able to recruit an ever-expanding number of instructors who will have wider and wider outreach.

We have observed student helpers on the junior high school level giving instruction in this method in a public school in North Carolina. It was startling to see that the student helpers were as effective in teaching as were the teachers. If 8th graders are able to teach reading to other 8th graders it becomes obvious that the number of potential teachers is limitless and that the demands of the Woolman method on the instructor do not preclude using youngsters themselves under supervision to teach others. A number of CORE chapters in New York are somewhat acquainted with the literacy program and many of our high school members have come to us asking when they can begin to implement the program in their schools and through their chapters. With the small amount of publicity there has been on the literacy program my office has been flooded with offers of professional assistance, with volunteers who want to become instructors and with inquiries from communities wanting to know when they can begin the program.

### Structure

I propose that a Center for Research in Community-Action Education be established in an appropriate university setting. Preliminary discussions have already been carried on with two universities and this proposal has met with initial positive responses. The university would receive and account for funds from all sources, public and private. The Center's sole initial function would be to research, develop and execute the literacy program on a national scale. This aspect of the Center's work shall be referred to as Phase 1.

The Center will require four operational arms: Research, Development, Planning and Community Action. Under Phase 1 the functions of these departments would be:

- a. Research Arm: To develop theory and perform experimentation directed to improving the efficiency of the processes of human learning, with emphasis on narrowing the gap between human potential and performance.
- b. Development Arm: To design and produce educational materials specific to the requirements for Community-Action Education Programs.
- c. Planning Arm: To coordinate the professional, educational governmental, and organizational resources to facilitate work done in the field. Further it would operate as a resource for the other three arms in the Center.
- d. The Community Action Arm: This arm would do the work of going out into the communities to carry out the plan of action and use the materials developed through the research and development arms. It would also evaluate and make recommendations for change in the methods of implementation employed by the cooperating agencies.

I further propose, however, that the scope of the University Center eventually be expanded into Phase II. In this second phase the Center should broaden its program to include all aspects of quality, integrated education. For example, Phase II should be concerned with sharply reducing the proportion of dropouts and increasing the ability of students to learn.

The functions of the four departments under Phase II would be expanded to include the following:

- a. Research Arm: Research in the whole area of school integration, and other research appropriate to developing quality education within the public schools.

- b. Development Arm: Development of proposals at the request of school systems and local organizations for achievement of quality, integrated education, and development of materials and textbooks toward this end.
- c. Planning Arm: Communication and coordination of the work being done by community action groups, boards of education, governmental agencies, and various experimental projects. Planning and expediting the transition from community-action education to public school education inasmuch as the success of Phase II will progressively render Phase I unnecessary.
- d. Community Action Arm: Act in a consultative capacity to school boards, school supervisors and community groups to assist in the solution of educational and training problems arising from intergroup tensions or desegregation.

It should be pointed out that the expanded scope (Phase II) of the Center is independent of and not a requisite for the national reading program (Phase I). A financial commitment to Phase I implies no such commitment or endorsement of the projected second phase.

#### Community Facilities

In addition to the University Center which would serve as the research administrative, and supervisory headquarters for the literacy development program, certain community resources will be required. It has been indicated that the body of instructors will be a prime resource provided by the community. Places in which to teach also will be necessary. Church basements, lodges, clubrooms, union halls, plant facilities and community centers will be ideal. In fact, the logic of the program indicates that the more the quarters are unlike a typical school setting, the better.

#### Funds

The educational crisis facing America requires a massive effort on the part of volunteer agencies. Only the federal government can support such an effort on the scale which is imperative. However, on a large scale the average cost of developing an eighth grade reading level in students beginning near point zero can be less than \$50. This low cost will be possible due to the use of volunteer instructors and free facilities.

In most cases the cost to a community or agency desiring to undertake the literacy program should consist solely of the investment of time and energy. The materials, research and supervisory staff would be paid for by the funds made available by the federal government. I am in the process of preparing a budget which will be available shortly.

#### THE PROGRAM OF ACTION

I would suggest that we begin implementation of the literacy program in Philadelphia or Washington, D.C. We should move next to Pittsburgh and New York City. After that we should expand into the South and as rapidly as possible spread to cities across the nation.

At the beginning we would use the network of CORE chapters, NAACP, Urban League, SNCC and SCLC units and Freedom Schools which already have expressed an interest in the project as the nucleus for implementation. These groups are uniquely equipped to move into this type of community program rapidly and effectively and without necessitating new and elaborate community machinery. But we shall by no means limit participation to civil rights organizations. Already, one of America's major industries has approached CORE about the possibilities of putting the reading method into effect among the workers in its plants.

The Center at the outset will develop facilities to train Literacy Instructors both on its own premises and in the field. In any given city we would start with a cadre of between twenty and fifty Literacy Instructor Trainees. They can be trained as Literacy Instructors in from twenty-five to forty hours of instruction depending upon the number of hours they have available and on their own motivational and educational level. At the end of their training period they will be fully equipped to: 1) instruct in the Accelerated Progressive Choice method, 2) recruit their own students, 3) secure their own facilities in which to carry on their instruction if necessary, and 4) maintain all appropriate records.

As Literacy Instructors they will work largely within their own neighborhoods with students of compatible backgrounds with whom they readily can establish rapport. Each Instructor will be able to teach up to twelve persons in a group. Depending upon their initial level the students can become student-Instructors within a period of 30 to 150 hours of instruction and many of them are expected, at the end of 250 to 300 hours of instruction, to be fully qualified as literacy instructors without having gone through cadre training.

The Community Action arm of the University Center will also develop a large staff of Community Reading Program Consultants whose function will be to investigate, develop and supervise new agencies which can serve as fruitful local instruments for this aspect of the War Against Poverty. Working under the Program Consultants will be teams of paid staff members drawn from the ranks of the Literacy Instructors, who will check on each local Instructor and provide him with methods for continually improving his effectiveness.

Coordinated and planned from the Center, largely utilizing the already existing structures of national and regional organizations, and drawing upon local initiative, the nation-wide literacy program can be functional in a surprisingly short period of time and with an extremely low per capita expense.

I believe that this welding of research, development, and planning to community action represents a major new force in the War on Poverty and the struggle for equality in our nation. This program is, as you know, very much a part of my deepest convictions and I would participate personally and actively in the Center to insure its viability. I intend to seek, and am confident of gaining, the support of all civil rights groups, as well as unions, churches, the business community, and the general public in this task.

Within the framework of a Research Center such as the one outlined, a target on the order of one million literacy trainees appears both practical and feasible. This Center is a vehicle which has not existed to this time, because there was no public requirement to combine research, development and community action. Now, it seems to me, it is a necessary development to help insure the success of the War on Poverty. It utilizes many forces and combines them into a synchronous and functional system.

This new kind of war demands its own special weapons. The Center for Research in Community-Action Education will be a vital addition to our nation's arsenal in prosecuting this war - against poverty and for social justice.