

SNCC

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THE SOUTHERN EDUCATION CENTER: AN OUTLINE

The following is a brief outline of a proposed Southern Education Center to conduct education of adults and school dropouts in the rural South.

NEED: The pace with which the southern Negro secures his rights and the extent to which the South attains real integration are contingent upon the development of an effective education program that will reach the masses otherwise untouched by formal schooling. In the rural South, Negro adults and school dropouts are completely without an educational program. The majority of these people are functionally illiterate, the average education being third grade equivalent. Because of his poor education, the southern Negro remains an unskilled laborer whose only source of employment is the cotton field. As the machine moves deeper and deeper into the South, the Negro has fewer and fewer chances of work, even in the fields. He is presently underemployed and, unless something is done soon, will become totally unemployable. The freedom movement, with its songs and sermons, has not escaped his ears. He is moving - to the jail, to the courthouse, to the streets of the South. He is also moving out of the cotton field and will not be wanting to go back. At the point when this man has the courage to put an "X" on the affidavit saying he has been illegally denied the right to vote, at the point when he has the vision to walk out of the field, then there must be a way for him to keep going. The way will be education.

This will also be the way for the southern white illiterate and poorly educated. These people are likewise unprepared to face a changing society. Many are unskilled laborers. Like the Negro, the white worker is threatened by automation. He is threatened, too, by the rise of the Negro and is unprepared to accept what appears to signal the collapse of his whole existence. Again, the way will be education.

The development of an effective education program for adults and school dropouts, both Negro and white, will depend upon the presence of institutions through which the program can be conducted. There are no existing institutions to reach Negro adults and school dropouts in the South. Nor are there existing institutions with adequate programs for white adults, nor would these institutions develop an integrated program.

It will be necessary to establish a new institution for the purpose of conducting a long-range program of adult education, job training, and education of school dropouts.

2) Vocational Colleges

Existing vocational schools fail to reach functional illiterates and, therefore, the potentially unemployable. These schools offer no vocational training to those without a comparatively high degree of literacy. This applies to both Negro and white vocational institutions.

B. Non-educational institutions

Of existing institutions with purposes other than education per se, there are those which should be carrying on educational and re-training programs.

1) Churches

If the white protestant churches in the South refuse to admit a person because of his skin color, they will not have the social concern to initiate an educational program for the poor and illiterate.

Negro churches are unable to finance the program, provide space, and train qualified workers or they have lacked the vision to begin such a program.

2) Labor

Organized labor is almost nonexistent in the rural South. Unions that do exist are for whites. Typical of existing unions is the Chemical Workers which contributes large sums to the Byron de la Beckwith defense fund, not because the members feel that every man has the right to a good lawyer and a fair trial.

3) Management

Accustomed to cheap and plentiful labor, southern management has no intention of educating Negro or white workers. Negro management, when it exists, is composed of the most conservative people in the community. The reason is obvious - too much is at stake.

4) Civic organizations

Members of white civic organizations are also members of the white citizens councils. Negro civic groups are either conservative or are unprepared to lead an educational program.

5) The state

To engage in an educational and retraining program for Negroes and whites would require a social consciousness. It is not evident that this consciousness is present in southern politicians and policy-makers.

Southern government will not be concerned with the education of these people. This means we cannot count on state employment agencies to cooperate with the retraining phase of the program, nor state education offices to work with literacy.

C. The Public School System

No school in the rural areas of the deep South is even tokenly integrated. Insistence upon utilizing facilities of these schools would result in their being closed. We would face a Prince Edward County situation of gigantic proportions. It will be possible and advantageous to the education program to recruit Negro teachers. It is not feasible to close the schools and have to undertake the education of thousands of children while attempting to begin an adult education program.

PROGRAM:

A. The purpose of the Center

The purpose of the Southern Education Center is to conduct a program of education for adults and school dropouts in the South. The Center will deal with the three primary aspects of adult education for the Negro - (1) literacy (2) job training (3) socio-economic education. In literacy and job training, use will be made of programmed materials. The most suitable approach to socio-economic education will be the workshop.

B. Structure of the Center

The Center will be located at a Disciples of Christ farm on U. S. Highway 80 between Jackson and Vicksburg. The location provides easy access to the Delta where the work will be concentrated. The farm, Mount Beulah, has dormitory space, offices, dining facilities, and large acreage. It also has a long-standing tradition of interracial meetings.

Satellite centers will be set up in the strategic areas. In terms of the Delta, these would be Greenwood, Greenville, Clarksdale, and Cleveland. In addition, we will utilize space and facilities of any existing institution available - Negro colleges, unused centers, mobile units, parochial schools, military installations, and veterans administration facilities. A Southwise survey of these existing institutions should be made.

C. Administration and organization

1) Board of Advisors: to be composed of educators with concern for civil rights and civil rights leaders with a concern for education. This large group will formulate overall policy for the Center.

2) Executive Committee: to be composed of people connected with the daily operations of the Center. Some of these people would be Dr. John W. Blyth, literacy program director; Mr. Robert P. Moses of the Mississippi Voter Education Program; Dr. A. D. Beittel, President of Tougaloo College; directors of the Center.

The functions of the Executive Committee will be the hiring of staff personnel; handling and distributing of funds, formulating of working policy; supervising the work of the Center; forming a liaison between the Center, the foundations, and the federal government; and maintaining the operations of the Center and the adult education program.

3) Sponsoring Colleges: two or more colleges will sponsor the Center. Funds will be handled by the colleges and paid out upon request of the Executive Committee. Colleges under consideration are Tougaloo and Hamilton.

4) Staff: The Center will have a staff of ten persons. Five of these will be program writer-teachers. Two will form the secretariat. One will handle visual aid. Three persons will handle administration.

Satellite centers will operate with two writer-teachers, two administrators, one clerical person. One of the writer-teachers will handle visual aids.

D. Recruitment of staff

Staff will be recruited from colleges, civic groups, churches and teachers. Staff will be trained initially by Dr. John W. Blyth and experts from the Center for programmed Instruction in New York.

E. Functions of the Southern Education Center

1) to conduct a program of education for adults and school dropouts at the Center and satellite centers.

2) To train staff from other organizations wanting to engage in independent education programs.

3) to research and produce materials for use in adult education and to make these materials available.

4) To act as a clearing house for educational endeavors dealing with adult education and education of school dropouts in the rural South.

F. Working agenda for the Center in 1963-1964

We will have the Center set up by mid September, 1963, and will begin with a training program for writer-teachers and with a series of socio-economic workshops and residence studies for the people in the Edwards Community (Mount Beulah).

1) Training of program writers: Dr. John W. Blyth and personnel from the Center for Programmed Instruction will be in residence at the Southern Education Center and will conduct an intensive training program for the writer-teachers. As soon as the first group is trained, we will proceed with the pilot project in literacy.

2) Socio economic Education: A working agenda for 1963-1964 in the area of socio-economic education should look something like this:

- (a) September - orientation of Tougaloo Work-Study Project participants (see Tougaloo Work-Study Project material)
- (b) October - experimental workshops for high school students in the community. They will be out of school for work in the fields.
- (c) November - experimental workshops in Economic and Citizenship Education for the farmers of southwest Mississippi.
- (d) December - during the holidays, a five-day conference of Mississippi students, with the purpose of forming a Mississippi Student Union.
- (e) January through May - series of economic and citizenship education workshops in cooperation with Operation Freedom and the National Sharecroppers Fund; series of civil rights workshops for high school students.
- (f) June - Mississippi Student Union Conference in voter education based around the 1964 election.
- (g) July - fourth of July week, a workshop in the Use of Song, Art and Drama in the protest movement. Contacting the Seegers, Odetta, the Freedom Singers, Dick Gregory, Sidney Poitier, Harry Bellafonte, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, etc.

(h) July - a week's workshop in publications and the movement.

(i) August - four-week human relations seminar designed to bring white Mississippians into encounter with the Negro students and community, the Negro into encounter with the white and with each other.

3) Workcamps: Throughout the year, the Center will host workcamps. They will be engaged in their own study program but will participate in the life of the Center. Workcamps might come from American Friends Service Committee, National Student Christian Federation, local churches.