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Proposed Educational Program
Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee

Note: Everything here should be considered suggestive, exploratory, re-worked, both before and during the Executive Committee meeting, so that we end up with a plan that has both realism and vision

The Problem:

Over 200 young people have interrupted their education at various levels--high school, college, graduate school--to devote their energies full-time to SNCC in securing civil rights for Negroes in the South. In so doing, they have put into practice one of those values which the nation's most farsighted educators and educational leaders have sought to place before the young people of the nation; commitment to helping one's fellow man. Thus, in a sense, it is those students who are not involved in this movement who are being educationally deprived.

Yet, while recognizing what they are gaining, we must also understand that these young people in the field are sacrificing important elements of education which are available in a formal academic setting: intensive reading, exchanges of information and opinions with others of the same intellectual interests, consultation with teachers and others having special knowledge or insights to share with young people. To have these available without the stimulation of social involvement--as is true in most academic situations--is to have only a partial education. But to be involved in social action, without utilizing its stimulation for intellectual growth, is to leave unrealized a great potential, for the individual and for society. Places like Antioch College have sought in their own way to combine the two, through alternating periods of field work and study. We are proposing, for field workers in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, a program that is specifically designed for civil rights activists, with the same broad goals of combining education and social concern that exists at Antioch and other similar programs.

The Plan:

To set up an educational system for the several hundred full-time field workers in the Southern civil rights movement, which--with minimum interference with their day-to-day work, will continue their educational development in the social sciences and the humanities.

There will be two main elements in this plan:

1. An "educational refueling" and rest period for all field workers every three months or four months--that is, three or four times a year--for five or six days. Groups of field workers will come, at different times (in groups of 50 or 100 perhaps) to some central place (in order to remove them from the area where work commitments may call them). There, led by a staff of lecturers and discussion leaders, they will do intensive study, reading, discussion--in history, political science, economics, literature, etc. Clearly, five or six days is a short time, but the main objective will be to set the tone, standards, directions, for the reading of other educational work which the field person will undertake in the long periods between refueling sessions.

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2. Each field headquarters will have its own going educational program under the direction of an individual for whom this will be his or her main responsibility. Within the general scheme projected at the last "educational refueling" session, people in the field will read certain selected articles, essays, books, (including novels), and get together for discussions one or more times a week.

The Curriculum:

At this point we can only make some general statements about curriculum, since much room should be left for flexibility. There cannot and should not be a duplication of formal academic curriculum. On the other hand, the environment of the field situation, with all its difficulties, should not become an excuse to dilute the educational work into ordinary "bull-sessions" or into work work on immediately utilitarian problems.

Subject matter should be designed to give the field worker a broad intellectual background, as well as factual knowledge and deeper perspectives for civil rights activity. For instance, the reading of great works of literature should be encouraged, even though there is no immediate relation to the work at hand; yet, novels by James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright, obviously very pertinent to here and now, should be read. The history of the Negro in the United States is an obvious and necessary subject; but major currents in 20th century world history (communism, Fascism, the anti-Colonial movements) should also be studied. Certainly, discussion of national politics and government could be related to political problems in the locality where the discussion is taking place. Economics should be taught not as abstract theory, but in terms of those things, which affect the realities of life in the South: corporate structure, the plight of the farmer, the labor movement, the role of government in the economy. A reading of Plato's Crito and Apology could be an entrance to a discussion on civil liberties in the United States.

All this is merely illustrative. A committee of educational advisers should work on broad curriculum policy. The various local discussion leaders will have much leeway to adapt subject matter to community conditions, in consultation with an over-all advisor.

The books to be used should not be text books, but works of quality which are interestingly written and intellectually challenging (not an easy combination to find; but this means advisors will have to work hard). They will be mostly paperbacks. Just to cite a few examples: C. Vann Woodward The Strange Career of Jim Crow, John Hope Franklin's Reconstruction, B. Franklin Frazier's Black Bourgeoisie, Howard Fast's Freedom Road and W.E.B. DuBois's The Soul of Black Folk might be good for Negro history. Essays and articles might be reprinted and used to good advantage, since they are more manageable as an assignment for a single discussion.

The Level:

Literacy and the three R's, which are badly needed both for some field workers and people in the community, constitute a large-scale problem which deserves separate plans. Here we are concerned with those at high school and college levels. Yet, our general philosophy about Field Education is that the basic problems of man and society, of beauty and truth and justice, can be understood and analyzed by all people of normal intelligence regardless, of formal educational background and if our approach is imaginative and intelligent.

Field workers include people who have not finished high school, and some who have finished college, so that various levels of background are represented. Still, there should be discussion sessions in all people in a given area participate, in order to give everyone the benefit of diversified background and education. Then, in addition, smaller groups might get together, consisting of those who want to pursue topics further or carry on certain discussions on a more advanced level. This double-level study might be applicable both for the refuelling periods, and in the day-to-day discussions.

Personnel:

1. One person in the Atlanta office who has as his or her chief responsibility the coordination of all field education, as well as the educational activity for the Atlanta staff.

2. Each project in the field should have one person assigned to it for whom education will be a main responsibility; this person will maintain a certain discipline in reading assignments and will plan and lead the discussion groups.

3. An overall advisory committee, consisting of persons who have not only competence in education but an understanding of the special needs of people in the civil rights movement, should be set up, for planning and consultation. These advisers will be generally available to act as lecturers, instructors, discussion leaders at the "refueling" sessions and also to go out into the field on request to work at different times with discussion groups there.

4. This advisory panel will be supplemented, for these purposes, by other persons, who might be available only for occasional assignments, who combine a knowledge of their field, and ability to communicate, and a commitment which makes their educational approach socially vital rather than purely academic.

Finances:

Funds will be needed for the following purposes:

1. To retain an educational director in the Atlanta office full-time.
2. To pay travel and maintenance costs for people going to the "refueling" sessions.
3. To pay travel costs for visiting lecturers, teachers, advisers.
4. To pay for the paperback books used in each area.

We will assume, at this point, that the place for the refueling sessions will be donated, and that teachers will ask only for travel expenses.

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In any event, it is clear that for such an educational program a large sum will be needed (\$15,000-20,000 a year as a rough guess), secured from private foundations or from the government.

Until this is secured, the program should get under way, with the appointment of educational directors in the field, with lists of readings, with an advisory panel established, with a "refueling" session planned for spring or early summer - perhaps coinciding with regular conferences and staff meetings to avoid extra travel expenses. Funds, in other words, should not delay the initiation of an educational program.