Education Power: Talent Search Helps Poor Realize Their Potential

"Today a young man or woman whose family's income is in the top half of the national income range has three times the chance to get a college education as one whose family is in the bottom half. This economic inequality is holding back both the next generation and our country. [Our first priority] is to end this form of inequality"—Clark Kerr, chairman of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, in announcing the commission's report on 12 December.

The nation's colleges, particularly during the past few months, have been engaging in self-examination and self-criticism for their failure to do more to aid students from poor backgrounds. In many cases, this intensive "soul-searching" has resulted in an extensive search for "soul."

Colleges now ask themselves, "How can we find more poor students?" or, more often, "How can we find more black students?" The main answers lie in increased recruiting, the provision of adequate financial assistance, and the development of supportive academic programs and campus conditions. But there is also one federally financed program which is of substantial help to colleges in locating such students.

This program, called "Talent Search," consists of centers and programs which are scattered throughout the country. These programs counsel not only black students, but also students from poor economic backgrounds, regardless of color. However, the existence of Talent Search does not insure that even a quarter of these students who could profit from college are being reached. For one thing, there are many cities and areas where there are no such centers.*

These centers are run on a low budget—$4 million annually for the 72 programs and a small Washington office which now consists of two full-time employees. David D. Johnson, an Office of Education official who directs Talent Search among his other duties, says that the program could profitably spend six or seven times its present annual budget. Partly because of inadequate funding, the plan for next year is to support only about 50 Talent Search centers. This will mean that about 30 percent of the current programs will go out of business unless they can elicit other means of support. A severe cutback this year in Federal funding for scholarship money for the poor further complicates the picture.

But even if there were numerous Talent Search centers with adequate funding, colleges would still have trouble finding the students they wanted. Many colleges say they want poor (or black) students, but what they really want is students with records and personalities like those they find among good, middle-class students—high grades and high College Board scores, the ability to speak well-enunciated standard English, and graduation from an acceptable private or public school. (For male applicants, athletic ability is a welcome additional qualification.)

Such students are not in plentiful supply among the poor. These students often have below-average College Board scores and have often been subject to low, random, or punitive grading, whether they deserved low grading or not. For example, of the approximately 500 students which Talent Search Center OPEN (Opportunity Project for Education Now) in Washington, D.C., counseled last year, 75 percent had "C" and "D" high school grade averages and a sizable majority had College Board scores ranging from 300 to 500 (out of a possible 800). As OPEN Director Floretta D. McKenzie explains, "We're not looking for the highly capable student; we're looking for students who really need assistance, the ones with average to low grades." Another worker comments, "Talent Search is something of a misnomer. Academically, the students we reach are not a fantastically talented bunch."

A high-quality college which is actively seeking to recruit more than token numbers of black or other disadvantaged students will probably have to take chances and to devise supplementary academic programs. Many colleges, however, seem unwilling to make the effort to devise special programs, and many seem unwilling to take chances on admitting students who come from poor academic or economic backgrounds. Talent Search centers say that they cannot find college places for all the students who want to attend college and who, the counselors think, could profit from the experience. The Office of Education reports that, in the past, many colleges have returned significant portions of the federal money they have been given to provide financial aid for students from poverty backgrounds.

But under the push of events, college attitudes may be changing. Since the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in April and with the subsequent pressure exerted by black students and their white allies on campus, many colleges have been scrambling over each other in their efforts to recruit black students. These efforts will probably also have a beneficial effect in obtaining places for other economically deprived students.

Functions of Talent Search

Talent Search centers can help colleges in several ways in their recruiting efforts. They can acquaint students with a wide variety of colleges; they can provide college admissions officers with a convenient place to meet with interested students from poverty-area high schools, and they can help college representatives make their way through the complexities of the local school system. The central function that Talent Search centers perform is the counseling of the individual. For

* Talent Search centers generally do *not* reach students in Maine, New Hampshire, Virginia, Alabama, Iowa, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Alaska, Massachusetts outside the Boston area, upstate New York except for Buffalo, Wisconsin outside Milwaukee, most of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland and South Carolina, northern Florida, eastern Kansas, Minneapolis-St. Paul, St. Louis, Dallas-Fort Worth, Phoenix and New Orleans. Even in those states and cities in which centers are located, there are large sections in which poor students are not counseled by Talent Search. "Search '68," a booklet giving a brief description of each of the 72 projects, the names of their directors, addresses, and telephone numbers, can be obtained from the Office of Education, Talent Search Section, 400 Maryland Ave. SW, Washington, D.C. 20202.

NEWS IN BRIEF

• **OE ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE**: The U.S. Office of Education (OE) has established an Advisory Committee on Accreditation and Institutional Eligibility consisting of nine educators with diverse backgrounds. The committee advises OE on the standards and practices of the many accrediting agencies throughout the country so that OE can be fully informed on the eligibility of potential recipients of federal grants. Thus the committee performs a quality-control function, ensuring allocation of grants only to qualified institutions and individuals. The committee does no accrediting itself, but could indirectly bring about changes in the policies and procedures of some accrediting agencies.

• **HEW RECORD FOR 1963–68**: In a valedictory report to President Johnson, Wilbur J. Cohen, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, estimated that HEW appropriations have risen by about 150 percent, to $51.3 billion, during Johnson's 5 years in office. In 1963, HEW funds constituted 18 percent of the federal budget and 3.7 percent of the Gross National Product (GNP); in fiscal 1969, HEW funds will represent 25 percent of all federal spending and 4.8 percent of the GNP. HEW obligations for medical research increased by two-thirds, to over $1.2 billion, and the number of college students receiving federal financial aid quadrupled.

• **ABM SITE PROTEST IN DETROIT**: Detroit area scientists, with the support of local congressmen and Senator Philip A. Hart (D–Mich.), are protesting three of the Army's proposed ABM missile sites, all located within 20 miles of the city. The protest was initiated on 7 December by physicists Alvin Saperstein of Wayne State University and Bill Hartman of Michigan State University; they are supported by about 20 scientists in the area and by local congressmen John Conyers, a Democrat, and William Broomfield, a Republican, both of whom have requested that the Army hold hearings before final decisions on a site selection are made. The Detroit protest is aimed chiefly at contesting, for safety reasons, location near a densely populated area of a defensive missile capable of carrying a 1 megaton warhead.

students attending high schools, such counseling might be thought to be unnecessary. Nonetheless, in many schools, especially those in poor areas, there are usually too many students for any counselor to provide individual attention. Also, the counselors are often not highly knowledgeable about postsecondary education or aware of the scope of opportunities now opening up for a previously ignored section of society. The Talent Search personnel are able to become expert about postsecondary possibilities, including college placement, in a way that many high school counselors are never given time to do. The centers are probably of even greater importance in helping those who have dropped out or graduated in past years. Such people often feel they have no place to turn if they need help with planning their future.

Talent Search programs, though all federally subsidized by the Office of Education, are sponsored by a variety of local organizations and especially by universities and colleges. Johnson, the national head of Talent Search, views the job of the programs as "to have informed, capable people with power who will put themselves next to kids, make them aware of their options, make sure that they have the experiences to make intelligent choices and the power to realize their options."

Many of the individual Talent Search programs deal primarily with one ethnic group, such as black students in the South or in northern cities, Indians in the West, whites in Appalachia, Puerto Ricans in New York, Jewish students on the eastern seaboard, or Mexican-Americans in Texas and California. On the other hand, many other programs, like that of the highly praised YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago project, serve a number of groups. One of Talent Search's two full-time national staff members, David Witcher, a young black administrator who helped run a program in northern New Jersey last year, comments, "One of the beautiful things about Talent Search is helping poor white students. Talent Search is set up for poor people, deprived people. And deprivation knows no color."

Characteristics of Centers

Many of the centers were started in 1966 and 1967, operate on a yearly budget of about $50,000, employ two to four professionals, and rely on volunteer help. They often give individual counseling sessions to about 500 students annually and talk to many more in group sessions. When they serve specific cities, their offices are usually located in a low-income area.

Project OPEN, which is located on one of the streets which suffered heavy fire damage during the April disturbances in Washington, sponsors a number of recruiting and educational activities in the inner city area including school assemblies and discussion clubs at the high schools and community centers. Those who run OPEN have been skillful in eliciting community support and participation.

Another of the programs that has been energetic in getting out into the community is Project TRY in northern New Jersey, which has been run by Montclair State College. TRY has used the mass media, as well as school assemblies and neighborhood meetings, to spread the word about financial assistance and other matters relating to postsecondary education. It has also persuaded 14 area colleges to reserve places for students identified by TRY and to accept a TRY graduate assistant whose job it is to help interpret the college to the newly admitted TRY students and to explain the students' problems to college authorities.

Many of the centers are linked to their area's colleges and rely on admissions personnel from these colleges for counseling. For example, Project COPE in Boston makes use of the part-time assistance of representatives of M.I.T., Brandeis, Boston College, Harvard, Boston University, and other area institutions. Other centers have hired local college students on federally financed "Work-Study" programs to interest youths in postsecondary education in their own neighborhoods during the summers.

There is a good deal of feeling among those involved in Talent Search operations that these programs must begin to reach poor youngsters well before it is time to go to college. It is believed that, even as early as grade school, young people must be made aware of the vocational opportunities open to them, the possibilities of attending college with financial aid, and of the ways to make their current academic activities serve their goals for the future.

Some centers provide extra activities to expand the vision of those with

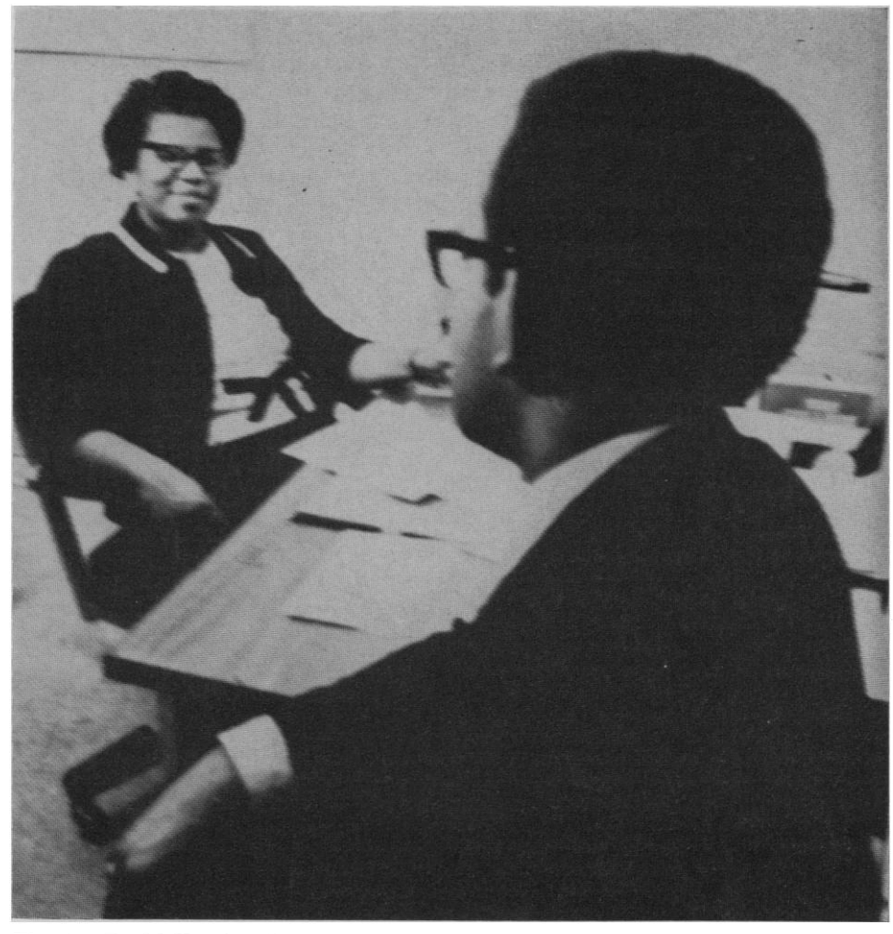
whom they work. With the aid of private financial donations, Sam Johnson, Field Director for the United Presbyterian Church's Talent Search project, takes Negro students from small towns in the Mississippi delta on 4-day bus trips to Atlanta. "There is nothing in that part of Mississippi which can make students aware of what they can do in life," Johnson comments, "We have to take them to the other side of the mountain." To make the trip, many are provided with the first decent clothes they have owned. In Atlanta, they stay in a Negro-owned motel, visit businesses, and talk about vocational and professional opportunities with Negro and white businessmen and professionals. When these students return to Mississippi, they are in great demand to speak about their experiences in Atlanta.

Those working in Talent Search programs are impressed with the desire of the poor to seek higher education and to become teachers, doctors, scientists, lawyers, and engineers. "It's not too difficult to convince them that they should continue," Mrs. McKenzie notes; "they know that they just can't make it in life with the preparation they have now." But, despite their desire to go to college, many are doubtful about their ability to do so. Mrs. McKenzie says that the primary worry of these students is finding the money to go to college and the second most common anxiety is wondering whether they have adequate preparation to compete successfully.

"For many of these kids," Witcher maintains, "their contact with Talent Search is the first time that anyone ever made them feel that they were worth something." Witcher emphasizes the need to expand the knowledge of the poor, "You have to give them choices—vocational and educational. The whole problem is that these people don't know the range of things to do in life. You have to tell them."

Those involved in Talent Search direction agree that a successful project works directly and individually with students. They also think it is necessary to have "a realistic target area," explaining that it is better to do something significant for a limited number of students in a small area than to do relatively little for individual students over a larger one. They feel that it is essential to have counselors deeply committed to the future of the individuals whom they advise.

Eventually, colleges are bound to be influenced by their participation in Talent Search projects. So far Harvard and M.I.T. have admitted only a small number of students who have come through COPE in Boston. However, M.I.T. has admitted two students from COPE whom it would not otherwise have found, and Harvard has admitted its first student in decades from South Boston High School, which is located in a poor, white area of the city. Boston College has been more forward-moving in devising programs for poor students. Brandeis University, partly through the efforts of politics professor William M. Goldsmith who served as COPE's director for a year, has become very active in seeking out disadvantaged students and this autumn has undertaken a major "transitional year program" to increase the number of such people who can come to Brandeis. A fairly general feeling among Talent Search workers is that colleges seriously committed to admitting the disadvantaged will have to devise supplemental programs to assist students in making their transition.



Floretta D. McKenzie, director of Project OPEN in Washington, D.C., counsels a high school senior. "More colleges are just going to have to open their doors to the ordinary black student," she has commented, "there are only so many of that 'super-Negro' most colleges are looking for."

Others in Talent Search emphasize that colleges are going to have to reassess the criteria they use to admit students. Walter D. Mott, a Princeton graduate who was on the admissions staff of Wesleyan University in Connecticut before becoming OPEN's Associate Director, argues, "Colleges are just going to have to learn that you can't read a kid's intelligence or native abilities off a piece of paper. The whole admissions process is geared to the middle-class kid."

Colleges that go out of their way to admit disadvantaged students will probably suffer periods of strain. But college officials should remember that severe student criticism is often undergirded by a real commitment to the student's college. "A lot of black kids may say they don't like a college," Mrs. McKenzie comments, "But the same kids will do anything they can to recruit more black students for the college. I

talked to a black girl at Smith this fall who seemed about ready to cry when I talked to her. 'I don't want to be a Smithie,' she said. 'I want to be a real person, a person relevant to my community.' But within a few weeks, that same girl was recruiting for Smith as hard as she could among black students over in Anacostia."

During observations made over the past year, this reporter has been impressed with the quality of the work being done and the great variety and depth of human needs which Talent Search tries to meet. But such a judgment does not mean that all is well with the Talent Search program. The national Talent Search office is so undermanned and underfunded that it cannot respond to nearly all the requests for assistance that it receives from its programs around the country; it cannot visit many local centers, engage in research to determine what happens to those counseled by Talent Search.

As mentioned earlier, the number of Talent Search centers will probably be cut by about 30 percent this year. Even those with noticeable imperfections which will be dropped are probably performing a much-needed service for their communities. (There is, of course, no reason why private organizations, cities, states, or groups of colleges should not finance their own Talent Search programs even if they do not receive federal funding.)

EOG Cutback

But for those interested in the welfare of needy college students, there is much more to worry about than the problems of Talent Search. In the past couple of years, colleges have relied heavily on federally provided EOG (Educational Opportunity Grants) money to provide financial assistance for poor students. This program is helping finance 145,000 new students around the country this year. Next year, however, a congressional cutback will mean that there will only be money for 31,000 new students under the EOG program. Harvard's financial aid director Peter K. Gunness says that this EOG cutback is "almost a disaster" for Harvard, and will mean far graver reduction in students aided by most other colleges. Even as Talent Search finds more students able to enter college, colleges will be receiving less federal money to give them the financial aid that they must have to attend.

One Talent Search worker pointed out that it was of utmost importance for counselors to be honest with the students. Then he added, "But how can we be honest when the government isn't honest with us? It looks like Congress has created this token piece of machinery to help keep the masses content so that they can drift peacefully back to the 'good old days.' They just don't seem to realize that there aren't going to be any more 'good old days.' The problems are too great to be met by tokenism."

In this season when the United States is properly enthusiastic about its ability to put men on the moon, it may be of reassurance to some to know that, in a small number of poverty-stricken programs, a few dedicated people still struggle to put men on their feet here on earth.

—BRYCE NELSON

New York Academy of Sciences: Report on Impact of Federal Cuts

A report from the New York Academy of Sciences titled "The Crisis Facing American Science" testifies both to the concern of scientists about the arrested growth of federal support for research and science education and to the difficulty of presenting effective evidence, to the public, of damage caused by the federal action.

The New York academy's report is a response to mandatory cuts in the federal budget ordered last May. An "emergency town meeting" of scientists and engineers was called at the academy on 21 June, and representatives of the academy went on to see President Johnson and his science adviser, Donald F. Hornig, at the White House on 31 July. Following this meeting, an ad hoc committee on evaluation of federal support of science, formed by academy president Minori Tsutsui, undertook a survey of academic institutions and academy members that was "designed to elicit evidence of present and potential damage to science and the nation of past, current and impending reductions in federal support."

The academy scheduled release of the report for late September, presumably in the hope that it might influence Congress and the Executive agencies to relent on some of the budgetary cuts. Not surprisingly, work on the report, based on a survey of 84 academic institutions and a random sampling of the academy's 26,000 members, took longer and was finally released on 23 December.

The 22-member ad hoc committee is made up of distinguished representatives of research and administration in the medical and natural sciences, including six Nobel prize winners and former presidential science adviser Jerome B. Wiesner. The findings and recommendations (see box) of the committee seem to reflect quite accurately the feelings inspired in those in academic science by the events of the past year.

The committee finds that federal cutbacks have had adverse effects not only on research scientists and their projects but on a generation of students and on the "financial integrity" of both state- and privately supported institutions of higher education. These adverse effects are felt particularly by "those persons and institutions that are not well established," says the committee.

The committee's argument is supported by two kinds of evidence, anecdotal and statistical. The report's findings are essentially a summarization of the opinions of the administrators and