

Has Title I Done Its Job?

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Accumulating evidence about the effectiveness of Title I ESEA programs raises serious reservations about the appropriateness of the "C" grade given Compensatory Education in the January 1981 issue of *Educational Leadership*.¹ What William W. Cooley refers to as "modest" pupil gains or program effects appear, nevertheless, to be consistent gains and hardly warrant the removal of mandated program components (restrictions, if you will) that may contribute to the increased achievement of Title I students. This article will address the issue of Title I effectiveness by reviewing the rationale for compensatory education, by summarizing the relevant research on the general impact of Title I, and by discussing program components that have apparently contributed to the program's success.

Historical Perspective

If the states and localities had been providing special remedial services for underachieving students 20 years ago there would be little need for federal involvement in basic skills education. The kinds of obstacles and inequities that existed in many schools before federal

aid to education was instituted on a large scale were revealed in a study conducted in a large midwestern metropolis by Patricia Sexton in the 1950s. She examined the relationship between a child's educational opportunities and the size of his/her parents' income by dividing all of the elementary and high schools into four groups based on average family income and collecting data about achievement and available educational opportunities. Approximately 285,000 students, 10,000 teachers, and 300 schools were involved.²

The findings were somewhat startling. Although all of the schools in the top two elementary school income groups were achieving above grade level on a standardized achievement test and all the schools in the two low-income school groups were achieving below grade level, remedial services were available to more children in the two top-income groups. Moreover, more children in the lowest income group of schools were retained (11 percent) as compared with less than 1 percent in the upper groups. "Gifted" children came exclusively from the top groups, while "delinquents" came from the lower groups. The lower groups had the highest yearly turnover in student population (49 vs. 17 percent), the most dropouts (22 times greater than the highest group), the largest classes, and the most health problems.³

The unequal distribution of resources was highlighted by the fact that the lowest group of schools had more substitute teachers in regular positions, as well as the oldest buildings with more substandard facilities. Forty-two percent of the

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schools in the lowest income group had no cafeterias and, consequently, served no free meals or free milk, while only 22 percent of the top-income group schools did not.⁴

Inequities similar to those described by Sexton did not exist in all schools in the country during the 1950s. Indeed, several large cities recognized the problem and took steps to institute changes (for example, the Higher Horizons Project in New York City and the Great Cities Improvement Projects in Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Milwaukee). However, it wasn't until 1964 and 1965, when large amounts of federal funds were directed to school districts on a long-term, noncompetitive basis by Head Start and Title I respectively, that a national commitment was made to improving the education of underachieving children from low-income areas.

In terms of effectiveness, Title I, like most federal education programs, has had its growing pains caused, in part, by perhaps naive notions concerning the powers of schooling. When programs such as Head Start and Title I began in the middle 1960s, many were of the opinion that a dosage of cognitive medicine at the age of three would have profound lifelong effects and that an extra period of "relevant" reading daily by a caring teacher could totally compensate for the child's background and bring his/her achievement up to grade level.

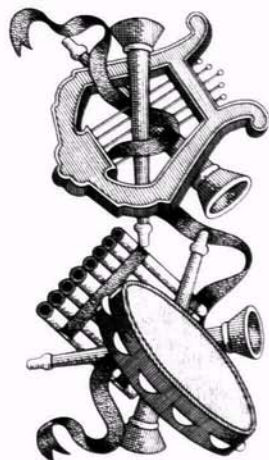
If the schools are to be the "great equalizer," it is logical that they extend their influence beyond the normal school day. Many educators failed to recognize the importance of this principle, however, when predicting miraculous benefits from programs such as Title I. In the late 1950s and early 1960s many proponents of compensatory education contended that (1) the total environment had a profound influence on intellectual development and school achievement, (2) the schools were an important *part* of the total environment, and (3) proper schooling for disadvantaged children could compensate for the inadequacies of the total environment. Indeed, an early determinant of Title I success was whether a program was producing greater than month-for-month achievement gains; that is, permitting children to catch up with what were usually their more environmentally advantaged counterparts.⁵ In order to accomplish this goal, compensatory programs such as Title I focused mainly on offer-

ing children an extra period of reading or math instruction. Using the foregoing analysis, such a program was targeted for failure, for the part cannot be equal to or greater than the whole. An extra hour of reading a day did not equal an environment.

If Title I has been unable to equalize the achievement of the nation's poor with its middle-class children, it apparently is not failing to accomplish the more modest, yet more realistic goal of improving the educational experience of participating children beyond that of similar nonparticipating children. On a national level the measurement of even these "modest" Title I effects, however, was a long time in coming.

Title I was launched in an era of perhaps unprecedented educational experimentation and innovation. Beginning in 1965, with a lot of new money and a fair amount of freedom to try out new ideas, local school districts instituted a variety of projects with Title I funds. While some programs directly addressed children's needs in the basic skills, others used Title I funds for "motivational" activities such as camping trips and increasing participation in the school band, activities that may have had little relationship to significant gains on standardized tests. A number of non-compliant enterprises were also funded (often because of uncertainty about the Title I guidelines and lax enforcement of them), such as hiring Title I nurses for an entire school and building swimming pools—not unworthy activities in themselves, but certainly not Title I.⁶

To the alarm of many educators the 1968 and 1969 national evaluations of Title I were unable to identify better than expected gains among average participants.⁷ The disappointing findings of these early studies may have been distorted by what could be called a "canceling effect," a concept that may be best understood if we recognize that educational evaluators have typically used the figure 1.0 to describe the mean reading or math achievement gain in a single year and that Title I eligible children normally achieved at about two-thirds that rate (.67).⁸ Since subjects in the national studies constituted a heterogeneous group exposed to an infinite variety of teachers employing a myriad of methods, what "worked" for some children may not have been effective for others. Consequently, students with appropriate instruction who were really benefiting from Title I and achieving at .9, (or in defiance of logic at 1.0 or



greater) were averaged with children only achieving at .67 or .4, for whom compensatory education had, at least in terms of measured achievement gains, been a meaningless or even negative experience. Since the large scale evaluations were unable to control for what may have been the relevant demographic variables and effectively isolate particular kinds of instruction, lumping together test scores such as these revealed that the overall academic growth was only .7 to .8 and researchers concluded that Title I was relatively ineffective. The fact that some children in the early national samples appeared to be benefiting in terms of achievement from compensatory education may lend credibility to this position.⁹

In the early 1970s, Congress passed legislation that significantly tightened up directions as to the use of Title I funds. The money was to be clearly spent in schools with high concentrations of low-income children (which certainly made sense in light of the Sexton study) and only on students with the greatest need in basic skill areas (reading, math, and language arts) regardless of family income. Title I programs were also to include such educationally promising components as coordination with other programs (including the regular classroom), evaluation, parent involvement, the dissemination of information about the Title I program to the local community and the staff, and requirements that the Title I activities should be supplementary to the regular school program.

The increase in specificity exhibited in the Title I legislation and regulations resulted in an increase in well designed Title I programs and greater reliability in documenting changes in achievement. In addition, many local educators charged with administering the Title I programs have often privately expressed gratitude for greater precision in the Title I rules and regulations because it helped reduce local pressures to diffuse the funds and services.

Program Effectiveness Today

Although researchers from the American Institute for Research, the RMC Research Corporation, the ED-NIE Joint Dissemination Review Panel, and NIE identified numerous effective Title I programs during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s,¹⁰ it was not until the middle 1970s that studies with national samples suggested an overall Title I effect.

Released in 1976, the Compensatory Reading Study tested over 50,000 compensatory education (CE) and non-compensatory education (NCE) students in grades two, four, and six during the 1972-73 school year, "a sample that is close to being truly nationally representative" for that age group. Generally speaking, achievement gains in reading of CE students compared favorably with NCE pupils. Several serious questions concerning the study's assessment measures, however, marred the positive findings. According to George Mayeske, OE sponsor of the study, there were many significant technical problems, among the most serious being "lack of proper control for statistical regression."¹¹

Perhaps the most important study of compensatory education to date is being conducted by the Systems Development Corporation (SDC). SDC is currently analyzing achievement data collected over a three year period from a national sample of elementary school children eligible for compensatory education services. Entitled the "Sustaining Effects Study," the primary purpose of the SDC survey is to assess the longitudinal (in this case three year) effectiveness of Title I and related programs. SDC has published the data from the first year of the study which shows Title I children generally making greater gains in reading and math than their disadvantaged counterparts not enrolled in compensatory education programs.¹² To what extent Title I pupil gains are sustained is, of course, an unresolved issue and data from years two and three of the study should shed light on the important sustenance question.

Probably the most promising report to date is the recently released survey conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) over a ten year period.¹³ Between 1970 and 1980 NAEP tested a sampling of the nation's 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old children in the area of reading at three intervals—the 1970-71, 1974-75, and 1979-80 school years. The exercises used in each assessment period were drawn from a common pool of items so that they were of comparable difficulty and therefore could reliably measure changes in student performance over time. Included in the report were the findings that between 1970 and 1980 black nine-year-olds gained 9.9 percentage points on NAEP's reading assessment measure whereas whites improved their achievement by only 2.8 percentage points dur-

ing this period.¹⁴ Zeroing in on Title I, NAEP reported significantly greater gains between 1970 and 1980 for students in Title I eligible schools than for pupils in non-Title I eligible schools at all three grade levels tested. According to NAEP, "These significant changes and the overall pattern of a narrowing gap for most population groups at all ages strongly suggest that students in Title I schools are improving at a faster rate than students in non-Title I schools."¹⁵

The SDC and NAEP findings are only correlational; consequently, one cannot conclude that Title I has *caused* greater pupil achievement. It is interesting, however, that unlike national studies of Title I in the late 1960s, the SDC and NAEP studies have finally reported what a host of smaller scale evaluations have suggested for years: Title I is associated with greater than expected pupil gains.

Improvement in research design and the development of more sensitive assessment instruments may have contributed to the recent collaboration of data suggesting Title I impact on a national level. Another contributing factor may be that Title I teachers are now employing more educationally sound instructional practices, or at least using strategies that are more likely to produce greater reading and math achievement gains. During the last decade, researchers have enjoyed some success in identifying variables associated with greater pupil gains on standardized tests, many of which, whether by coincidence or design, have become a part of the Title I regulations.

What Makes the Program Work

One often gets the impression of late that the regulations attached to federal education programs exist principally to confuse the public and keep bureaucrats lucratively employed. While Title I may have its share of regulations of questionable value, the following principal requirements are for the most part educationally sound, having emerged from educational theory and the findings of empirical research:

1. *Supplement, not supplant, and provide for increased learning time.* There is impressive evidence suggesting that the more students study reading or math, the better they perform. Two of the more important recent studies suggesting the significance of "time on task" are the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study and an NIE sponsored as-

assessment of effective schools.¹⁶ Title I must supplement, not supplant local effort. It is important to recognize that the Title I child receives Title I reading and/or math instruction *in addition* to the regular district offerings in those subjects—at least in the elementary school where most Title I programs are located. Title I services are largely scheduled in the elementary school during independent “seatwork” activities in order that the child does not miss out on direct teaching time in the regular classroom. This requirement also prevents school districts from using Title I as a dumping ground for children for whom the school feels no responsibility.

2. *Evaluation.* The monitoring of pupil progress by pre- and post-testing permits some measure of program effectiveness and contributes to planning for instructional activities that focus on the measured acquisition of reading and math skills. Without the evaluation requirement, it would be much more difficult to determine whether the program was working. A basic skills accountability factor, Title I testing, the general results of which are public information, may help keep students on task by keeping teachers on task. It is probable that the evaluation mandate has some effect on how well teachers state objectives and prepare lessons, behaviors that typically correlate with greater pupil learning.¹⁷

3. *Coordination of effort.* A regulation of long standing, the coordination of Title I and regular school activities appears to be particularly important for children whose home environment is incongruent with that of the school. The last thing these children need are schools where the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. Because of increasing Title I emphasis on program coordination, the various teachers and principals should now be engaging in greater dialogue about the remediation of learning problems.

Empirical support for the significance of program coordination comes mainly from studies of what constitutes an effective school. Among the more prominent research studies in this area are those conducted by Ronald Edmonds in Detroit and Michael Rutter in inner-city London. While these reports do not mention coordination of effort per se, one may assume their findings lend credibility to the importance of a united academic front. In the American study, Edmonds identifies the degree of strong administrative leadership (“without



Photo: Parents Magazine Films, Inc.

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which the disparate elements of good schooling can neither be brought together nor kept together") as an important variable in low income schools whose students are achieving above expectation.¹⁸ At the secondary level, Rutter points to the school's *ethos* (that is, high expectations, student feeling of willingness to consult with teachers, consistency of values) as accounting for much of the variation in school achievement.¹⁹

4. *Parent involvement.* Promoting the critical linkage between the school and the home is perhaps Title I's most important requirement, for (1) it permits people who have long been denied equal access to the political process to have input in educational decision making and (2) it encourages a greater harmony of the home environment with that of the school, with the goal of increasing the responsiveness of both institutions to the child. Far from taking away local control, low income parents typically view federal programs like Title I as extending local control. The issue here is not local autonomy vs. federal encroachment but which community groups are going to exercise influence. Traditionally school boards, district administrators, and to a lesser extent teachers and P.T.A.s (essentially representing conventional interests) have run the schools and in so doing have often ignored the special needs of handicapped and economically disadvantaged children. Somewhat ironically, perhaps the greatest obstacle to the administration's plans to cut Title I and legislate block grants has been the federally mandated Parent Advisory Councils, whose letter writing campaigns have voiced opposition to such intentions at the grass-roots level.

Data from the research literature support the critical role of the parent and home in influencing children's educational achievement. In a 1971 study entitled "Parent Involvement in Compensatory Education Programs," Milbrey McLaughlin listed several home and parent factors that relate to academic achievement such as parental concern and support for achievement and learning.²⁰ In addition preliminary analyses of findings on attitudes and activities of parents in Follow Through projects indicate "that in comparison with the control group, Follow Through parents were more aware of their children's school programs, more likely to visit school and work in classrooms as paid volunteers, more likely to talk to teach-

ers and other school staff, and more convinced of their ability to influence school programs."²¹

Other relevant research on the primacy of parental influence includes Bronfenbrenner's finding that family intervention is necessary to sustain preschool cognitive gains,²² his reporting that initial parent involvement as late as 11 or 12 may pay significant scholastic dividends,²³ and Bloom's recent conclusion, from studies in 28 countries, that the home environment accounts for more variability in pupil learning ability than any other factor.²⁴

5. *Other.* Other program components that contribute to an effective Title I program from a logical point of view but that may need more definitive research confirmation include the dissemination of information and staff development. The dissemination requirement was to keep the community informed about the Title I program as well as to encourage the use of current research and promising practices in the Title I program itself, which ties in with the staff development component. By capitalizing on the increased competence and expertise of the Title I staff, which has access to more inservice opportunities than are generally available to the regular classroom teachers, the teaching level of an entire school can be improved.

The new legislation for Title I—which is contained in the Elementary and Secondary Education Block Grant and is subtitled "Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981"—maintains it as a separate categorical program. (Title I will become Chapter 1.) While several program components remain intact, the important parent involvement section has been all but eliminated, although programs must still be "designed and implemented in consultation with parents and teachers of such children" [Sec.556(b)(3)]. Parent Advisory Councils will not be mandatory after September 30, 1982, though it appears that they *may* continue to be a program component.

It is strongly recommended that the states and localities overseeing Title I funds encourage the active participation of parents through advisory councils and that other worthy program features be maintained. Along with parent involvement, greater "time on task," evaluating pupil progress, and coordination of effort are probably components fundamental to any quality basic skills program. Title I teachers, as resource persons, should be responsible

for sharing their research effective model with other educators.

Although it may have fallen short of its original, lofty goals, Title I appears to have filled an important void. Significantly greater equality of educational achievement may depend upon major reductions in the inequality in the total environment. In the meantime, Title I, as an effective basic skills program for underachieving children, remains one of our most important equalitarian strategies. ■

¹W. Cooley, "The Effectiveness of Compensatory Education," *Educational Leadership* 30, 4 (January 1981): 300.

²P. Sexton, *Education and Income: Inequalities in Our Public Schools* (New York: Viking, 1961), p. 20.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 25-113.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 113-136.

⁵M. Wargo and others, *Further Examination of Exemplary Programs for Educating Disadvantaged Children* (Arlington, Va.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 055 128, 1971), p. 15.

⁶*Hearings before the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity of the United States Senate, Ninety-second Congress, Part 17. Delivery Systems for Federal Aid to Disadvantaged Children* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. 8674-8719.

⁷*Education of the Disadvantaged: An Evaluative Report on Title I, Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Fiscal Year 1968* (Arlington, Va.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 047 033, 1970), p. 97; M. McLaughlin, *Evaluation and Reform: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Title I* (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1974), p. 57.

⁸See D. Hawkrig and others, *A Study of Selected Exemplary Programs for the Education of Disadvantaged Children, Part 1* (Arlington, Va.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 023 776, 1968), pp. 30-31.

⁹*Education of the Disadvantaged: An Evaluative Report on Title I, Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Fiscal Year 1968*, p. 97.

¹⁰D. Hawkrig, *A Study of Selected Exemplary Programs*; M. Wargo, *Further Examination of Exemplary Programs*; M. Wargo and others, *ESEA Title I: A Reanalysis and Synthesis of Evaluation Data from Fiscal Year 1965 to 1970* (Arlington, Va.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 059 415, 1972); C. Foat, *Selecting Exemplary Compensatory Education Programs for Dissemination Via Project Information Package* (Arlington, Va.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 099 456, 1964), p. 14; *Educational Programs That Work* (San Francisco: Far West Laboratory, Fall 1980); P. Hill and I. Rotberg, *The Effects of Services on Student Development* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Of-

fice, September 30, 1977); *Compensatory Education Study* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, September 1978), p. 83.

¹¹G. Mayeske, *A Study of Compensatory Reading Programs: Technical Summary* (Washington, D.C.: USOE, OPBE, Elementary and Secondary Programs Division, September 1976), p. 61, quoted in Robert Rossi and others, *Summaries of Major Title I Evaluations* (Arlington, Va.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 145 012), p. 128; Quotation from a telephone interview with George Mayeske, June 25, 1980.

¹²L. Carter, "The Sustaining Effects Study: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Compensatory Education," a presentation at the Second Colorado Title I Conference, Colorado Springs, Colorado, January 4, 1980; M. Wang, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Compensatory Education," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, April 10, 1980.

¹³*Three National Assessments of Reading: Changes in Performance, 1970-1980, Report No. 11-R-01. The National Assessment of Educational Progress*, Denver, Colorado, April 1981.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁵"Has Title I Improved Education of Disadvantaged Students? Evidence from Three National Assessments of Reading," National Assessment of Educational Progress, Denver, Colorado, April 23, 1981, p. 1-2.

¹⁶C. Denham and A. Lieberman, *Time to Learn*, California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing, May 1980; D. Brundage, ed., *The Journalism Research Fellows Report: What Makes an Effective School?* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership, April 1980).

¹⁷See Wargo, *Further Examination of Exemplary Programs*, pp. 185-186; B. Rosenshine, "Academic Engaged Time, Content Covered, and Direct Instruction," *Journal of Education* 60, 3 (August 1978): 46.

¹⁸R. Edmonds, "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," *Educational Leadership* 37, 1 (October 1978): 22.

¹⁹"British Researchers Look at Urban Secondary Schools and their Effects on Disadvantaged Children," *Education Times*, January 28, 1980, p. 2.

²⁰M. McLaughlin, "Parent Involvement in Compensatory Education Programs," *Policy Research in Education, Series No. 6*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p. 8.

²¹U. Bronfenbrenner, "A Report on Longitudinal Evaluations of Preschool Programs, Volume II: Is Early Intervention Effective?" DHEW, Publ. No. (DHD) 76-30025, 1974, p. 41.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 56.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 42-43.

²⁴"Report on Preschool Education," (Washington, D.C.: Capitol Publications, October 21, 1980), p. 5.

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