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Grant Files

PUB ED

October 13, 1970

Edward J. Meade

Joshua L. Smith

Harlem Preparatory School

On Wednesday, September 30, I spent the day visiting the Harlem Preparatory School.

To visit this school is an emotional experience which will require considerable sorting out of stimuli over a period of time. Never having visited the institution before, I was somewhat unprepared for that which was to follow my crossing the threshold. The haze of blue smoke floating toward the ceiling and the high decibel level made it unlike any other educational institution I have visited. Though the decibel level was high, I am also forced to conclude that the attention of the students is not distracted from the teaching-learning process which takes place behind shoulder high room dividers.

I spent several hours with Edward Carpenter, the Headmaster, and was probably dazzled by his ability to relate instantly to the students who seem to cross through his open office door continuously. Some could say that the dialogue between Carpenter and the students was a bit on the corny side, but it was obvious that it was aimed at creating a supportive psychological environment for students. He instinctively knows when to be supportive and when to be severe.

Carpenter's enthusiasm carries over into the classroom instruction that I observed where teachers seem to constantly refer to "the Prop" and what it stands for. Conscious efforts to build student morale are evident everywhere, for every teacher seems to find some point in the lesson to build an esprit.

Carpenter and I did not get into any specific discussion concerning expenditures that he has made under the grant, nor did we get into any specific discussion about future funding. Moreover, I was rather discouraging to him about the possibility of receiving a further grant although he did say that he was desperately searching for funds for teacher salaries.

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It is difficult to draw any hard conclusions about the school other than to say that the humane atmosphere is very apparent and as I should have known, it is possible to have a humane environment while relatively traditional teaching methods are being used. It is obvious that several more visits will be necessary to determine just how successful this school really is.

The next day, by telephone, I spoke to Mrs. Carpenter who is the Administrative Assistant for Curriculum to explore with her the possibility of the school drawing upon the services of Orlando Taylor from the Center for Applied Linguistics. Mrs. Carpenter stated, as I knew she would, that the school's budget would not allow her to engage a consultant. She did, however, express keen interest in having Mr. Taylor work with her teachers provided that someone else might be able to undertake the costs of his services. Since that time, I have spoken to Marjorie Martus who revealed that Mr. Taylor will not have large amounts of time to spend and that he would prefer to become involved only with our urban projects on the east coast. We have concluded that perhaps it might make sense for the Foundation to engage Mr. Taylor as a consultant who could provide technical assistance to some of the urban projects in the east.