

TO: Mrs. Deborah Cole
The Aaron E. Norman Fund

FROM: Mary Varela
The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee

RE: Report on Adult Education Activities Funded by
The Aaron E. Norman Fund.

DATE: February 20, 1966

Enclosed are:

- PANOLA COUNTY MISSISSIPPI, 1965 - filmstrip
- IF YOU FARM YOU CAN VOTE - filmstrip
- SOMETHING OF OUR OWN - reading books

Currently in production are:

- SOMETHING OF OUR OWN - filmstrips
(to accompany reading books)
- HOW TO MAKE A SLAVE
(a negro history filmstrip to accompany
the SNCC FREEDOM PRIMER)

THESE materials represent a change in the direction of my work as outlined in our request for funds at the end of the Selma Literacy Project Report.

The emphasis is now on the production of teaching materials. Training of teachers and initiation of adult education programs has become a secondary emphasis.

The reasons for the change in emphasis lies in the nature of the Southern movement at present and in my growing experience as I continue to service the adult education needs of this movement.

Adult education programming will not be effective in long range terms if it is initiated just for the sake of teaching people to read "because they ought to know how" or for any of the other reasons put forth by educational programmers (who's reasoning I suspect, finds roots in a fear of "illiterate" people). My own experience has verified the unworkability of such programs as has the experience of many others I have consulted with who have been involved in both domestic and international adult education programming.

If educational programming does not meet people's felt needs, the program does not sustain itself and on-going self education after the program does not continue. (In most cases, people even forget the reading skills they did learn). Those few programs which have succeeded (mainly international) have been programs which either moved with the people's own movement for socio-economic change or programs which brought almost immediate gratification of needs by transmitting information instrumental in bettering one's living conditions.

The movement here in the South is involved with people moving and speaking for themselves around their basic needs. Despite the northern "image" of this movement (largely constructed from second-hand hearsay and newspaper accounts) and despite the movement's admitted difficulties over the past few months -- it must be stated here clearly and firmly that this movement is indeed going about the job of confronting institutions and structures -- local, state and federal -- which persist in segregating out from decision-making those considered "unqualified" by color, educational or economic status.

There is no one organization organizing this movement; there is no one group of elite leaders creating its program. Ordinary people on a local basis are moving and the organizations operating in the area are moving with them. The movement spans a wide variety of needs from moving to take over the Greenville Air Force Base for food and jobs; the running of black candidates, the creation of independent political parties, the establishment of agricultural, small business, and housing co-operatives, the planning and building of homes and small industry, the registering of people to vote, the confrontation of the federal government about its political motives in the funding or non-funding of poverty programs.

Whatever the needs, people are in their own way with varying degrees of effectiveness moving to better their lives by challenging and changing those institutions making decisions about their lives. In this process local leadership is growing in commitment and in this growth influencing new people to join with them. There were close to 700 people who met recently to talk about food, jobs and land at Edwards, Mississippi. An estimated one-third of these people had no previous movement affiliation. Many of them had never been to a meeting of this type before and many more spoke for the first time about their needs and their desires to change their lives and make it better for their children.

This new mood, operating especially in Mississippi and Alabama is expressing itself in the setting up of economic self-help programs. People have decided they no longer want to depend on anyone -- plantation owners, county or state governments, or the federal government for their basic needs. As a result the movement has a depth and meaning to it that the voter registration movement never achieved. People want to work for themselves; People want to provide for their own food and housing needs instead of having to rely on dole. This has always been the desire; Now the desire has a movement and a voice.

How adult education fits into this new mood became most clear to me when I observed a meeting of people to talk about the setting up of a brick factory to service housing and small industry needs. Although discussions on the brick factory were held, the most significant happening of that weekend to me was to watch people exchange information on what they were doing to help themselves, and to listen to the questions they asked.

"How long does the Okra have to be to market it?"

"How much does quilt stuffing cost?"

"How did you get your loan for farm equipment?"

"Where did you go to market your Okra?"

"How much money does it cost to get a charter?"

It became very apparant that the adult education materials needed to serve the movement were those which communicated the specifics on how to do something. People would find most useful (therefore of most educational value) to have those materials which came from the actual experiences of other people moving to help themselves. Consistent with what was learned from our research in Selma, the text for these materials should be written by the people themselves. Beyond these research considerations, however, simple observation would lead to this conclusion. All that is necessary is to observe someone from a different economic and educational status trying to communicate complicated or technical information to a group of community people. Then observe that same information being broken down and communicated by a local person who has experienced using that particular information. The response of people is markedly different and the possibility is increased that they will be able to take and use that information to help themselves.

There were some practical considerations in my decision to change the emphasis of the program from that of training people to that of developing adult education materials. It is very difficult to go around and talk to people about adult education programming. People don't have the time nor the patience to listen to educational philosophy. Not only that, talking doesn't persuade people that such programming will be relevant to what they are in motion about. I needed to be able to demonstrate how adult education programming could evolve from people moving to meet their needs. Most importantly I needed for people to make the decision themselves that they wanted such programming. It also had to be possible that these people would take the responsibility in evolving that programming since I was only one person and could not hope to be everywhere I should have been and take the responsibility

for evolving a local program at the same time.

I also discovered (by watching myself and others) that people are especially authoritarian in a teaching situation when they have no visual aids and reading materials. (Not just any visual aids and reading materials, however. The materials need to be relevant to peoples immediate needs and aspirations) These tools serve the purpose of taking the teacher's mind off himself as main motivator in the class. The subject of the tools becomes the main motivator and inasmuch as it is useful to the learner it is that much more of a total learning experience.

By discussing the tools already in use, I hope to communicate the guidelines used in the creation of materials and also what has been learned from the use of these materials.

FILMSTRIPS

The advantages of filmstrips are numerous:

- a. filmstrips are inexpensive to produce and reproduce. Through the assistance of Mr. Jerry Oberwager, who by profession creates teaching and visual aids, we have here in Mississippi a complete filmstrip making operation. Besides training us, Mr. Oberwager is raising funds to supply the movement with filmstrip projectors and other equipment helpful to the development of visual aids.
- b. filmstrips do not require a great deal of technical knowledge to produce. This is an advantage because it means people from all over can come and make their own strips. They don't need someone else to do it for them. They can collect their own materials and with a little bit of training, edit it and shoot the filmstrip.
- c. filmstrips take the emphasis in the learning situation off the teacher by focusing attention on the story being told in the strip. The response of the learners to the story and how they can use the information in their own lives is expected to carry them through several learning experiences by themselves, thus encouraging self-education.
- d. filmstrips assist people who want to communicate information by making them break it down to very concrete terms. It's quite difficult to ramble on with abstract terms and then try and find a picture to illustrate this abstractness.

By the same token -- filmstrips are a natural tool for a people who's communication habits are concrete by nature.

PANOLA COUNTY MISSISSIPPI, 1965

This is a filmstrip about how the people of Panola County organized themselves to register to vote. More than that, however it is the story of the entire movement in Panola County as it touches on such issues as jobs, better education, etc. No words are projected with pictures in this filmstrip. The commentary is the sole basis for the story. The advantages to this type of filmstrip is that non-readers and new readers do not at first get hung-up in trying to spell through the words. They can concentrate on the story and how it relates to their own situation. The class that might follow would be a discussion of the learner's own county and how the information found in the strip would be useful. The drawback in not having words of the story projected with the picture is that without the script (in case of its being lost or unavailable) the filmstrip is useless. A story cannot be pulled together from the pictures alone.

This strip's usefulness, however, is not in the information communicated as much as it is in the telling of a story which reflects conditions found in most counties in the South. Learner's can easily relate to the description of these conditions and find strength in the movement of the people of Panola County in changing their political conditions.

This is one of the first strips made. It is a little too long and at times very wordy. People sometimes start to get restless by the end. In spite of the length, the strip has received a very good response wherever it has been used.

IF YOU FARM YOU CAN VOTE

The election of farmers to the ASCS Committee which decides cotton allotments has always been in the hands of the white farmers in every county in the South. The result of this is that most of the extra acres allotted to each county goes to the big farms and plantations. The small farmers, especially the black small farmers, can hardly get more than a half to two acres over his allotted acres to plant cotton. Cotton money multiplies for those who already have it.

Besides the absolute white control of the ballot and the counting of the ballots, another difficulty in organizing black farmers to nominate their own candidates and vote for them is the complicated procedure in nomination and balloting. To attempt to communicate this verbally at a mass meeting is usually met with failure.

We decided to attempt a filmstrip that would take the complicated technical material (one suspects the Department of Agriculture is staffed by frustrated lawyers) and break it down in a useable form.

The results were impressive. Staff members and community leaders who used the strip passed on such remarks from the farmers as: "For the first time I understand this business with the envelopes (an important step in validating the ballots), or "now I understand what this cotton committee is all about," or "Now I understand why it's important for us to elect a lot of people all over the county," etc.

The filmstrip has several weaknesses. It is too long, again. We used maps and charts quite a bit. These forms of illustrations are least effective and dull. We learned from this strip which photographs are the best in getting the message across. There are a few pictures in the strip which are too cluttered or were irrelevant to the text accompanying the frame. The two frames which brought the most response were the cartoon and the picture of the white men standing around.

The captions were a beginning attempt to introduce reading with pictures and make the strip useable even if the text would not be available.

The basic text of this strip is from a taped meeting of farmers organizing themselves to nominate candidates and from a taped interview of Mr. Luther Honeysucker who was a successful candidate in last year's election in Madison County.

READING MATERIAL

The original plan had been to create supplementary reading material (illustrated with pictures from the filmstrip) to go along with the filmstrip. The strip's purpose was to get the viewer interested by telling a quickly moving story which was visually exciting. The accompanying reading booklets would integrate the additional information which was not possible to include in the strip. With experience, however, we found that only certain of the strips lent themselves to such books.

SOMETHING OF OUR OWN: Part I and II

This is the story of a group of farmers in Panola County who decided to get together to sell their own okra instead of selling it through the white buyer in town. Later on in the year they received a \$113,000 poverty program loan for heavy farm equipment.

Farmers in Mississippi and Alabama who have heard of the co-operative through movement staff have asked repeatedly for more information so they could start one. The problem was to construct materials which would communicate both the story and the information in a useful form.

The Co-op felt that a filmstrip was a good way to communicate their story and appointed several men to tape the story the way they wanted it told. The tape was then edited into a two part filmstrip. Since it was more possible to print the story than shoot a strip at that particular time, the book was done ahead of time and is now being circulated. It will be a few weeks before it is known how useful this book is.

FUTURE AREAS OF PROGRAMMING

As was noted in the beginning of this report -- the CO-Operative filmstrip is ready to be shot and will be circulating in a matter of weeks.

On the drawing board is a filmstrip on Negro History. The purpose of this particular strip is not so much to relate historical events as to prepare a group of people to read the Freedom Primer -- a Negro History text published by SNCC. The strip asks provocative questions around the absence of Negro History from American History and from the consciousness of this country as a whole. The strip is especially useful in a creative writing learning situations where after it is shown, people can be asked to express their feelings about their own history.

1. Film Strip Training Workshop

In order that the information and technical knowledge about how to do a filmstrip does not remain concentrated in the hands of one or two people, a workshop is to be held in the middle of March. Mr. Oberwager will be asked to conduct sessions on the technical and layout requirements of a strip, while SNCC photographer Robert Fletcher and myself will deal with subject matter, story line and picture selection. We hope to be able to have moeny enough to pull people from a four state area -- both staff and local leadership.

2. Greenwood Radio Station

In a matter of weeks there will be a carrier current radio station set up in Greenwood, Mississippi. The organizing emphasis will attempt to bring the Greenwood Negro community into a position of responsibility and decision-making around the areas of programming and support. In order to do this, workshops will be held around questions on progamming, finance and decision making. Community people from the Newark, N.J. ERAP project are being invited down to explain how they expect to deal with programming and financial probelms found in the setting up of their radio station. Materials will be created which will assist the Newark people in visually communicating their experiences. After the Greenwood station is set up and going -- materials can be created by the people there which can communicate to others cities how they can do the same.

Besides these obvious adult education needs, it will be possible to try adult education in a community by radio. The specifics of this, however, cannot be dealt with until the people in Greenwood decide on the kinds of programming they want.

There are other less formal kinds of work which can only be generally described. There are individuals who come regularly asking for assistance in planning literacy or adult education programs. Informal sessions are held which deal with the specifics of literacy training.

SUMMARY

An immediate effect of the efforts noted in this report has been that those individuals and organizations operating especially in Mississippi and Alabama have been influenced to re-think their ideas on communicating information and planning adult education programs.

Usually when organizers (those with a college background) want to get information out into the community -- they sit down and type up brochures, leaflets or longer forms of materials which are then either mailed out or distributed door to door.

These materials are very largely ineffective in communicating information so it can be used. Vocabulary and language style is abstract and uninteresting.

Organizers are now beginning to think more visually, since filmstrips have been introduced. Written materials are now beginning to include pictures and quotes from community people.

Organizers are finally coming to learn that most printed material containing information useful to poor people is not in reality written for poor people. They are also learning that the type of written communication they learned in college is a communication style good only for a certain group of people in the country.

And finally, they are beginning to see that the vocabulary and language style of "uneducated" people does a better job of communicating information to be used than does any carefully constructed, grammatically correct treatise. Instead of sitting up in offices writing materials, people are now going out with tape recorders and holding workshops with local people to find out what they feel and how they want the information broken down.

The local people who have expressed a desire to construct materials are learning that their point of view and their own expression is valuable in that it tells the story more expressively and in a generally more useful way. This allows people to slowly grow out of their inner paralysis about expressing their needs or aspirations.

Most of all it is hoped that through these efforts, local leadership will begin to construct means of communication and adult education far more effective than what we have attempted to do.

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