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A test group of young teacher interns -- most of them Indians and all of them undergraduates -- is breaking new ground to find ways that will motivate Indian pupils to stay in school and learn more.

In the process, the.20 interns are developing ideas that may stimulate more young people like themselves to stay in college, complete their teacher training, and go out and teach more Indian children,

What they and their professional mentors learn as they go along may prove to be valuable to disadvantaged non-Indians facing similar problems.

The tools they use are as up-to-date as television's "instant replay" with videotape.

The unique experiment, now underway at the University of Southern Mississippi, is sponsored by the education division of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, with the help of seed money contributed by a private, nonprofit corporation called MIND (Management Institute for National Development),

Unlike most teaching experiments, it derives many of its basic premises from ideas put forth by Indian tribal leaders, as well as from professional educators. Cooperation and participation of the tribes, themselves, is considered a highly important part of the program by the Bureau.

The pilot program arose in response to two problems that have long plagued people who work in Indian education, and finds its counterpart among educators working with other disadvantaged groups.

Many Indian children feel uncomfortable and somehow lost in schools that rely on conventional teaching methods, The English language may be unfamiliar; the usual textbooks fail to help them relate the subject matter to things they readily comprehend; the usual teaching methods do not evoke the same lively response they may arouse in average, middle-class American children. For these and other reasons, the dropout rate in Indian schools is high, and formal education is not always considered a valued goal for a reservation Indian.

Another problem sterns from the loss of prospective teachers from the ranks of young Indians who graduate from high school and even start junior college, then fall by the wayside, Lacking adequate guidance and counseling, sometimes short of money for tuition, afraid of failure, or otherwise unequipped by their schooling to cope with the pace of a modern college or university, they have been dropping out too frequently.

To combat these situations among the potential teachers and the taught, the Mississippi interns are being exposed to revolutionary teaching procedures and programs, while they, themselves, are given confidence-building, eyeball-to-eyeball counselling by three master teachers, and by university personnel who act as instructors in the field.

Almost from the beginning, the intern is cast into the classroom experience. He is taught that total

involvement with the child is demanded of him, not just in the schoolroom but whenever possible, in the community where the youngster spends the rest of his time: What are the interests and wishes of his parents? The children he works and plays with? PTA organizations? The church, the Government agencies that serve the community?

When the intern works with classroom textbooks and finds that some of the material is hard to relate to reservation life, he is expected to create more graphic instances from the examples around him -- not Dick and Jane, from some never-never land, but Freddy and Johnny from Philadelphia, Miss.

While a teacher intern works with three children in a study situation, he is monitored by a TV camera. Then he reruns the tape with a master teacher present.

"Look, while you were talking to Fred, Johnny’s eyes were wandering. Why do you suppose that is?”

"I just can't get Johnny's attention."

"But you have. He's trying to get yours. That's his way of doing it. Now, what you've got to figure out is how to change this negative reaction of his, into positive participation. You've got to make him want to participate in the class ... want to learn."

Here is where the intern's community involvement experience comes in. After all, why should any child really want book-learning, especially if that child is a Choctaw Indian, son and grandson of Choctaw share-croppers who have lived on the fringe of the local economy for years?

Why should Johnny go to school? Why not out fishing with his father? Or at work making money in the fields?

The answers aren't slick and pat. There are thousands of Choctaws who have long considered share-cropping acceptable as a way of life, with fishing as their avocation.

One answer came this way: "You want to stay alive to fish, don't you?" asked the intern.

"Sure," said the pupil.

"What does that sign at the intersection say?"

"Stop."

"And if you couldn't read it, you'd get run over by a car, wouldn't you?" Lesson one: Know a child's background and you know more about motivating him.

Bureau of Indian Affairs educators believe that much of the success in launching the program has been due to the cooperation of the Indians, themselves.

When the program idea was conceived, education people went directly to tribal leaders, university educators, Bureau Area and Agency personnel, and the Indian sector of the Choctaw Community Action Program, for full discussions.

The Indians voted on every major phase of the project, and when it was ready to go they took pride in their part in it and have maintained their interest ever since.

Not the least innovative of the program's practices is the requirement that the interns need have only a minimum of two years' college education to qualify. Each is getting a $75 a week stipend while going to school--another "first."

Cost of the program for the first year's trial run will be about $230,000, exclusive of the stipend money, which is provided from a companion project developed by the University and the Bureau.

The interns get two academic years and three summers of total commitment to their pupils. Their own progress is guided by three professional teaching teams

who work with them at all times, offering private counseling; helping with teacher pupil relationships that carry over from the classroom, through recreation, social areas, the home; and analyzing teaching problems, coming up with answers, and applying those answers to constantly changing teaching situations.

Recently, interns and master teachers watched themselves on videotape as they came into a classroom and were individually introduced.

"But look what's happening," noted one of the teachers. The camera showed a divided room: master teachers on one side, Indian interns on another, the other concerns in still another area.

"What kind of communication can we expect from the children, when we divide up like that," said the teacher. "Mix it up!"

Indians .and non-Indians alike realized that they wouldn't have the crutch of fellowship to depend on when they eventually took over their own classes. Subsequent teaching teams were well integrated.

Dozens of hours of this type of teach-and-learn technique, the Bureau of Indian Affairs believes, will create a new breed of teacher. Where regular education courses take 3\ years, and drop the novice teacher into a classroom with only “substitute teaching" experience, the Bureau's program should graduate interns who are not just, student teachers, but disciplined professionals, ready for anything the classroom has to offer.

An additional incentive for future teacher recruitment is the fact of immediate involvement of the prospective teacher. Young people today are notoriously impatient to become involved in the world around them; this new approach supplies that need.

Finally, Bureau educators believe that their innovations can be applied in teaching clinics, anywhere. College dropouts, for example, are not limited to Indian students; and the community participation approach to the "whole child" can as well be applied to a black ghetto or a New Mexico barrio.