



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: May 15, 1975

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The Bureau of Indian Affairs is going to take a long, hard look at the educational needs of Indian, pre-school-age children. And what can or should be done to improve the development of infants, toddlers and youngsters up through the age of eight.

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Morris Thompson has announced that a \$325,000 contract has been awarded to the Bank Street College of Education New York City, to make the study.

"To some people it seems odd that we would be concerned about education programs for such young children," said Dr. Clennon E. Sockey, the Bureau's Director of Indian Education Programs. "Research has indicated, however, the crucial importance of these first years. It is estimated that 50 percent of a child's intellectual potential is developed before the age of 5."

Sockey said this does not mean the five-year-old knows half as much as he ever will. It is, rather, a matter of ability to learn which is established. "In the early years, even before birth," he explained, "impairments to learning can be created which could be prevented or reversed if caught soon enough."

Results of the study and program recommendations will be submitted to the Congressional Appropriations Committee as an information base for making funding decisions about BIA education programs.

Two pilot programs for children up to age four are now in operation in the Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico and the Choctaw Reservation in Mississippi. They are called Parent-Child Development Programs. In these programs the goal is not to teach a lot of things. It is, instead, to bring together the resources of the community and the family to enable the child to enjoy a healthy, happy and stimulating beginning of life. Many Indian children just beginning school have already suffered permanent damage to their learning abilities because of previously undetected hearing defects, pre-natal malnutrition or other physical, emotional or intellectual problems.

The role of parents as the first and primary educators of children is stressed in these programs.

The study will be carried out in six BIA field areas with the cooperation of participating tribes.

Bank Street College is a private graduate school with a prestigious reputation among educators. The school has been extensively involved in the development of Head start, Follow Through and other early childhood education programs. Staff members have worked with the BIA in the establishment of kindergarten programs on the reservations and the training of teachers and aides of these programs.

An Indian advisory board will be established to provide guidance for the project. Indian professionals will also be added, in top level positions, to the project staff and Indian community members will be trained for the collection of data at the reservation level.
