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## Table of Contents

	Page
On the Dependence of O-H Bond Length in Hydrogen Bonded OH---O Systems Venkataraman Ananthanarayanan .....	6
An Approach to the Fiction of Miguel de Unamuno Alma C. Allen .....	10
The Problem of Theoretical Approach in Economic Investigation Sarvan K. Bhatia .....	15
The Development and Status of Industrial Arts in Georgia Schools Clyde W. Hall .....	22
Synthesis of 4:6 Thio 1, 3, 5-triazine Derivatives [1] Kalmalaker B. Raut.....	29
Flow Parameters Behind Three Dimensional Shock Wave Nazir A. Warsi .....	31
Ability Grouping: Pros and Cons John Wesley Jordan .....	34
In Our Other America Raymond Pace Alexander.....	50
Isolation of Lignoceric Acid from Acorns Charles Pratt .....	58
Why Climb Mount Parnassus Miles M. Jackson, Jr.....	60
An Appraisal of a Pre-Freshman Summer Program Robert D. Reid.....	65
Desegregation and Library Education Elonnie J. Josey.....	72

## Table of Contents – (Continued)

	Page
Certain Condensation Reactions with Copper Powder as a Catalyst Kamalakar B. Raut .....	78
Qualifications of College Teachers: 1918 - 1962 Philip D. Vairo .....	80
A Study of the Second Year Female Academic Probates at Tuskegee Institute Tommie M. Samkange .....	90
Experimental Studies Exploring the Effectiveness of the Group Method in Counseling Philip D. Vairo and Sheldon Marcus .....	108
Thermodynamic Parameters Behind Three Dimensional Shock Wave Nazir A. Warsi .....	112
Development Planning Under Democracy: The Case of India Sarvan K. Bhatia .....	116
Synthetic Preparation of Apiose from Dihydroxy Acetone Charles Pratt .....	126
Deflection of Streams Behind a Curved Shock Wave Nazir A. Warsi .....	131

# An Appraisal of a Pre-Freshman Summer Program

by

Robert D. Reid

Within the past few years pre-college programs for educationally deprived young people have been undertaken by a few institutions of higher learning, including approximately twenty predominantly Negro colleges and universities. Most of these projects have been carried on during the summer months for periods ranging from six to nine weeks, although some of them have been conducted on weekends, following the close of the school day, or during evening hours. Adult education programs have been made available by some institutions in order to provide vocational and non-vocational opportunities for persons whose educational training has been interrupted or curtailed.

Many of the summer programs have been designed for prospective Negro college students who seems to have the potential to succeed in college but whose academic records and/or scores on standardized tests indicate the need for remediation. While a few of the institutions have designed programs for students who have completed the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades, most of them have enrolled selected groups of students who have graduated from high school. Because of the support received by the colleges and universities from several leading foundations, students have attended these pre-summer institutes without charge or after paying a very nominal fee.

Even though the greatest impact would be achieved in bridging the gap among disadvantaged young people if compensatory programs were launched on the elementary and secondary levels and most desirably before these young people begin their formal education, it is likely that the predominantly Negro colleges will assume some of this responsibility for a long time. As McGrath has well said, “. . . the opportunity for a college education cannot be postponed for twelve years while children receive adequate elementary and secondary education. For many the nation's predominantly Negro colleges must bridge the gap. Rather than limiting their admissions and their programs, these colleges must be prepared to use a variety of special educational devices . . . to repair the academic deficiencies of high school graduates and prepare them to proceed apace with their higher education.”<sup>1</sup>

The writer was privileged to direct an eight-week pre-college program at Tuskegee Institute between July 15 and August 7, 1964, in which one hundred and sixty young people were enrolled. The project

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<sup>1</sup>Earl J. McGrath, *The Predominantly Negro Colleges and Universities in Transition*. (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teacher's College, Columbia University), pp. 50-51.

was partly financed by the Doris Duke and Ford Foundations. Most of the student participants had indicated Tuskegee Institute as their first or second choice college when they were administered the Cooperative Intercollegiate Examination Program. These students ranked below the fiftieth percentile and above the fifteenth percentile in at least two of the three areas tested (English usage, reading comprehension, and mathematical computation). Of the eighty-seven females and seventy-three males who enrolled in the program, one hundred and four were in this category; twenty-six students had graduated from high school, but ranked above the fiftieth percentile in the three subject matter areas. Thirty students who had completed the eleventh grade were permitted to enroll in order to determine whether there would be significant differences between the rates of progress made by the two groups of students. Without exception the eleventh graders had superior academic records and ranked at or above the fiftieth percentile in the three areas tested on the Cooperative Intercollegiate Examination Program.

A charge of fifty dollars was made to participants for room, board, laundry, incidental fees and instructional materials. One hundred and forty-nine of the students were residents of seven southeastern states: (Alabama (92), Florida (10), Georgia (30), Louisiana (4), Mississippi (2), South Carolina (9), and Tennessee (2)). The remaining students came from seven other states (9), the District of Columbia (1), and the Virgin Islands (1). Three students dropped out before the project was concluded because of illness.

The group was pre-tested on June 15 between 8:30 and 10:00 a.m., and from 1:30 until 4:30 p.m., and again on the morning of June 16 between 10:00 and 11:30 a.m. The following tests were administered: (1) Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Maturity; (2) Nelson-Denny Reading Test (Form A); (3) Iowa Silent Reading Advanced Test (Form CM); (4) California Test of English Usage (Form A); and (5) California Advanced Mathematics Test (Form W).

Most of the students ranked below the fiftieth percentile or tested below their grade level on the pre-test. One student who dropped out of the program during the first week was absent when the tests were administered. On the Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Maturity, the I.Q.'s of 112 students (70.4%) ranked between 85 and 114; the I.Q.'s of 45 students (28.3%) were below 85, while the I.Q.'s of two students were about 114.<sup>2</sup>

On the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, 122 (76.7%) of the 159 students ranked below their appropriate grade levels; 115 (72.8%) of 158 tested below their grade levels on the Iowa Silent Reading

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<sup>2</sup>There is reason to question the test results on the Henmon-Nelson Test. One student, for example, whose I.Q. was indicated as 79, had a grade placement of 13.8 on the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, a grade placement of 13+ on the Iowa Silent Reading Test, and a grade placement of 14.8 on the California Advanced Mathematics Test. This student ranked at the eightieth percentile on the California Test of English Usage.

and California Advanced Mathematics Tests; 104 (65.4%) of 159 ranked below the fiftieth percentile on the California Test of English Usage.

Results on the pre-test for the thirty eleventh graders were significantly better than for the group as a whole. Seventeen of these students tested at or above their grade levels on the Nelson-Denny and Iowa Silent Reading Tests, and eighteen students were in this category on the California Advanced Mathematics Test. Nineteen of these students ranked at or above the fiftieth percentile on the California Test of English Usage, while the I.Q.'s of twenty-six eleventh graders ranged between 85 and 114 on the Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Maturity. The I.Q.'s of two of these students tested above 114.

In our pre-planning conferences it was decided to provide instruction mainly in the areas of literature, reading, and mathematics. Students who demonstrated weaknesses in English fundamentals and in mathematics computation were to be given special instruction through the use of programmed learning materials and the employment of teaching machines.

Eight sections of literature and mathematics and nine reading sections were created on the basis of the test scores made by the students on the Nelson-Denny Reading Tests.<sup>3</sup> Twenty students were assigned to each literature section, while ten students were enrolled in each of four sections in reading, twenty each in three sections, and thirty in two sections. Eight sections of mathematics were created—four for the teaching of traditional mathemaics and four modern mathematics sections.

In addition to the Director, eleven highly experienced instructors participated in the Pre-Freshman Program (three in reading, four in literature, and four in mathematics). The eleven instructors were assisted by ten teaching assistants (four in reading, three in literature, and three in mathematics). Nine of the teaching assistants were graduates of such universities as Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Princeton, Howard, and New York; three of the teaching assistants were pursuing work beyond the master's degree. A tenth teaching assistant had completed the junior year at Stanford University. The teaching assistants aided instructors in the classes, corrected papers, provided tutorial instruction for individuals and small groups, and performed other assigned duties.

Students in the literature course were assigned a minimum of seven paperbacks during the eight-week period of instruction—J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* by James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, *Native Son* by Richard Wright and *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain.

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<sup>3</sup>Grade equivalents for the nine reading sections are as follows: (1) Section A, .7 to 7.6; (2) Section B, 7.6 to 8.3; (3) Section C-1, 8.5 to 8.9; (4) Section C-2, 8.9 to 9.0; (5) Section D, 9.0 to 9.6; (6) Section E, 9.6 to 10.4; (7) Section F, 10.6 to 11.3; (8) Section F, 11.9 to 12.1; and (9) Section H, 12.3 to 14+.

Emphasis in the reading program was placed upon increasing reading comprehension and rate of reading and in building vocabulary. Nineteen films, which were rented from Pix Film Service, were shown to students in the nine reading sections.<sup>4</sup> Tape records, special phonograph records, readers which were designed for students of varying reading levels, and standardized reading tests were utilized in the reading program.

In addition to a basic textbook, students in traditional mathematics used programmed materials, while those in modern mathematics followed assignments in an appropriate textbook. In general, students who demonstrated the greatest deficiencies in mathematics were assigned to modern mathematics sections. In assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Pre-Freshman Program, mathematics teachers expressed the opinion that this arrangement should not be followed in the future.

Classroom instruction was supplemented by outside activities which were designed to provide varied cultural experiences for the students. During the first two weeks students viewed the Huntley-Brinkley telecast on a daily basis and spent as much as an hour afterwards in discussing current events under the supervision of teaching assistants. When it appeared that daily attendance for this activity interfered with other student obligations, attendance was reduced to two required sessions each week. In addition, participants attended cultural programs which were scheduled for all summer school students, enjoyed activities which were available in the College Center and the gymnasium, and were provided other forms of wholesome recreation.

During the seventh week a questionnaire was administered in order to obtain the impressions of the students regarding the program. Only two of the enrollees stated that they had not derived significant benefits from their participation, although the conclusions of the students regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the programs were far from unanimous. Most of them felt that instruction was generally effective, although some expressed the opinion that certain teachers were not sympathetic enough with their academic problems.

At the close of the eighth week students were again administered the Henmon-Test of Mental Maturity, California Test of English Usage (Form A), Iowa Silent Reading Advanced Test (Form CM), Nelson-Denny Reading Test (Form A), and California Mathematics Advanced Test (Form W.)

On the Henmon-Nelson post-test in which 156 students participated, 66 (42.3%) made higher scores than on the initial test; 75

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<sup>4</sup>Films shown in the reading program were (1) Build Your Vocabulary; (2) How Effective Is Your Reading; (3) Homework; (4) Learning From Class Discussion; (5) Do Better on Your Examinations; (6) Importance of Making Notes; (7) Find the Information; (8) How to Remember; (9) How to Read a Book; (10) It's Fun to Read Books; (11) Literature Appreciation; (12) Reading Improvement; (13) Improve Your Reading; (14) How to Read Newspapers; (15) Look It Up!; (16) Building An Outline; (17) How to Prepare a Class Report; (18) How to Judge Facts; and (19) Propaganda Techniques.

(48%) had lower scores and the scores of fifteen students (9.7%) remained unchanged. The relatively disappointing performance of many students possibly can be accounted for by the fact that this test was the last to be administered on a humid and muggy afternoon in a room that was not air-conditioned. Declines in raw scores on the Henmon-Nelson Test were not statistically significant. On the other hand, most of the raw scores of students whose I.Q.'s increased were markedly improved.

Results for the California Test of English Usage were more encouraging, since 68 (43.9%) of the 155 students who were examined improved in terms of percentile rank. Forty-two (27.1%) of the students made lower scores and 45 (29%) remained in the same percentile rank. Among students whose total scores improved, there were often pronounced changes. One student ranked at the first percentile in English usage on the initial test and at the fortieth percentile when re-examined; another was at the twentieth percentile at the outset and at the eightieth percentile on the retest. On the other hand, a student who ranked at the sixtieth percentile on the first test was at the fifth percentile when retested. Generally speaking, there was no marked change in total scores among students whose percentile ranks declined.

Results on the Iowa Silent Reading retest were somewhat better than those on the Nelson-Denny retest. On the Iowa Silent Reading Test, 116 (76.3%) of the 152 students who were re-examined were at a higher grade equivalency, twelve (7.9%) were at a lower grade equivalency, and the grade equivalency for 24 (15.8%) remained the same. On the Nelson-Denny Test 102 (65.4%) of the students improved in terms of grade equivalency, 46 (29.5%) declined, and eight (5.1%) remained the same.

Results achieved on the Iowa Silent Reading Test at the beginning of the program indicated that 111 (73%) of the 152 students were below their appropriate grade level in reading; 73 (48%) were in this category in August. On the Nelson-Denny Test, 122 (78.2%) of the 156 students examined were not reading at their grade level at the outset and 93 (59.6%) at the conclusion of the program. On the Iowa Silent Reading Test, fourteen (9.2%) of the students ranked at or above the fiftieth percentile in June, and 41 (27%) in August.

Comparative results of the number of words read per minute on the Nelson-Denny Reading Test are available for only 123 students. One hundred and twenty-three (87.8%) of the students improved in reading rate and fifteen (12.2%) did not. Sixteen students more than doubled their initial reading rate. On the initial tests the number of words read per minute ranged from 75 to 511; the range at the conclusion of the program was from 74 to 615. A student who read 85 words per minute in June was reading in August at the rate of 333 words per minute; the reading rate of another student increased from 153 to 430. On the other hand, one participant who read 188 words per minute on the first test covered only 74 words per minute in August.

On the Iowa Silent Reading Test, which was administered in August, 120 (77.9%) of 154 students were at a higher grade placement, seven (4.6%) experienced a decline, while the grade placement of 27 students (17.5%) remained the same. One participant increased in grade placement from 4.8 to 9.8 and another from 7.0 to 14. However, one student's grade placement was 14.0 in June and 10.0 in August.

The pre-freshmen achieved their best results on the California Advanced Mathematics Test. When the California Advanced Mathematics Test was given in June, 29 (18.8%) of the 154 students ranked at or above the fiftieth percentile; 57 (37%) were at or above the fiftieth percentile in August. On the retest 145 (94.2%) of the 154 students improved in grade placement, 6 (3.9%) declined, and the grade placement for these students (1.9%) remained unchanged. In terms of percentiles, 116 (75.3%) were above their initial ranking, 2 (1.3%) were below, and 36 (23.4%) remained unchanged. One student advanced from the first to the fortieth percentile and another from the second to the ninety-fifth percentile. Twenty-eight students, however, who were in the first percentile initially did not improve in percentile ranking, although 25 of these students made some improvement in grade placement.

It is possible that mediocre performances by some of the students may have been due to vision or hearing defects. Before the conclusion of the program, vision and hearing tests were conducted by the reading teachers. Of the 133 students who were given the vision test, 98 (73.7%) failed the test, three had questionable vision, six needed to wear glasses which they had previously purchased, one required corrective eye habits, and only 25 (18.8%) had perfect vision. Results on the hearing test were more satisfactory. Of the 119 students who were administered this test, 85 (75.5%) seemed to have perfect hearing, 31 (25%) failed the test, and three (2.5%) had hearing defects. Even though the tests were administered by laymen, it is reasonable to assume that they were not without merit.

The eleven teachers who provided instruction in the Pre-Freshman Program made written evaluations following its conclusion. Among its major achievements, as listed by the teachers were (1) most of the students learned how to budget their time and the importance of using the library; (2) students experienced for the first time some of the rigors and rewards of intellectual effort and became aware of the social give-and-take exacted by dormitory life; and (3) significant and even dramatic improvement in reading comprehension and rate, mathematical computation, and literary appreciation were achieved by large numbers of the young people. Despite the fact that the teachers recognized that certain improvements and refinements should be made in future programs, they were unanimous in stating that it contained more pluses than minuses. One teacher expressed the sentiments of her colleagues when she wrote: "For the student who was insufficiently prepared, the Program afforded a wonderful second chance. It should reduce considerably the high percentage of persons from this group who would normally take remedial classes when they enter college."

The teachers were high in their praise of the performances by most of the students who had completed only the eleventh grade. Except for five of the thirty eleventh graders, the test scores for these students were at least as satisfactory as the average scores made by students who had completed the twelfth grade. As a result of superior test scores and outstanding classroom performances, twelve of the eleventh graders were invited to enroll at Tuskegee Institute in the fall of 1964. While the **Tuskegee Pre-Freshman Program** was not initially designed as an accelerating device for bright youngsters who had not completed high school, such recognition of talent was as satisfying an outcome as the positive results which were achieved by many of the high school graduates.