

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR BILL SAFIRE

From: ^{5/} Daniel P. Moynihan

It seems to me that in describing the need and potential for the National Institute of Education (can you improve upon the name?), we want the President to say some things that will cause people to sit back and take notice. There are some areas of educational research where we do know a few things that aren't generally known or accepted, and where the Institute has real potential for teaching us a good deal more. We have tried to outline a few examples:

1. Professor Jerome Kagan of Harvard has found that the difference in language and number competence between lower and middle-class children is significant by the time the child is 4 years old, and awesome by the time he enters the first grade. Such a discovery must necessarily affect our entire approach to early childhood education and compensatory education.
2. Professor James S. Coleman and colleagues, in the study known as Equality of Educational Opportunity, found that there are pronounced regional differences in educational achievement, beginning with the earliest grades. It may be that what are thought of as ethnic differences are in fact partly geographical, another profoundly important discovery for our educational process, but one that needs much additional study.
3. In the same study, Coleman and colleagues found that different ethnic groups in the population show markedly different educational achievements in the first grade, and that those differences remain proportionately constant throughout school.
4. Professor Gerald Lesser of Harvard may shed some light on this phenomenon with his discovery that learning patterns are different among the various ethnic groups. In other words, it may be that youngsters actually learn differently, according to their ethnic heritage. We need to know much more about this, and the ways in which it might influence educational policy making.

5. We have developed a whole range of different methods of teaching reading, and battles continue to rage over which one is best. In practice, it seems that no one method is best; in any case, we are still producing a lot of school graduates who can't read very well. Far more careful attention needs to be paid to such processes.

6. Professor Jerome Bruner of Harvard has done landmark research into cognition itself, trying to explain what "learning" is, especially among very young children. Jean Piaget, the great Swiss psychologist, has done the same, although from a conceptually different orientation. We are beginning to get glimmerings of understanding here, but this--perhaps the "most basic" of all basic educational research, needs more attention from top scientists.

7. In a study of infants from low income families, Dr. Earl Schaeffer of the National Institute of Mental Health found evidence that the youngsters' I. Q. 's decline between the ages of 14 and 21 months. In fact, as soon as it is possible to begin to measure verbal skills in very young children, low income children are found to slip below middle class infants. Dr. Schaeffer also found that intensive home tutoring by skilled practitioners can have a dramatic effect as early as the second year of life. Clearly, such forms of compensatory education need considerably increased attention.

8. Dr. Benjamin Bloom has concluded that, for youngsters in a consistent environment, about half of their adult intelligence is acquired by age 4. Others have found that, by varying the environment, intelligence can be boosted in mature adults. This whole set of questions--what is intelligence, what affects it, how can it be altered?--are at the very core of educational policy, yet we know only enough at this time to realize what more we must try to learn.

9. Nearly all American youngsters now go to high school, and more than three-quarters of them graduate from 12th grade, but we find that almost 15% of all high school seniors read on or below an eighth grade level. As a matter of public policy, it little avails the nation to provide schooling without providing education; it is a waster of the youngster's time and the taxpayer's money.

10. We know that most American youngsters spend more time watching television than they do in school, and that television is the most pervasive medium in the history of the world. This is wholly a development of the past 2 decades, yet one that our educational system has not yet come to grips with. We need to find out just what effect television and other non-

school educational influences have on youngsters, and how they can be used to assist more directly in the educational process. Bringing education into step with modern technology and living patterns may be the great challenge of the next decade.

11. We know that varying class size within the customary limits has little measurable effect on what children learn. But we have little idea what class sizes might have a significant effect.

12. Similarly, we have the beginnings of research evidence on the importance of school organization, but little data to suggest how we might vary that organization to alter educational results.

13. We know that, despite the general lack of success of our compensatory programs, there are isolated and unexplained projects that seem to have a very great effect, indeed. It is careful scientific probing of events such as these that has altered the history of science itself and led to great discoveries that lift mankind centuries ahead. We have enough to be tantalized by the possibilities, but need much more if we are to achieve the deep understanding that permits improvement.

14. We know that, in the United States, mothers typically have their first child near the time of their own 22nd birthday. We can combine that fact with the knowledge that the first few years of a child's life are critical to his intellectual prowess and educational achievement. And yet we have almost no idea how to teach girls to teach their infants, nor how to alter schools to provide such learning.

15. We know that institutions other than the school--the family, the church, the club, the pool room--have profound educational effects, greater in many cases than those of the schools themselves. Yet we do not know with any precision what those effects are, or even how to measure them, much less how to alter and strengthen them in conjunction with the schools.

16. We know that for most of our citizens, the American educational system is among the most successful in the history of the world. But for a portion of our population, it has never delivered on its promises. Until we know why it works when it is successful, we can know little about what makes it fail when it is unsuccessful--knowledge that must precede any rational attempt to provide our entire population with optimal educations.