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OPERATION CHALLENGE 1967

BY REDMOND C. S. FINNEY, '47

Mr. Finney is Acting Head of the History Department and Head Coach of the Varsity Football Team

It all started in the early spring of 1966 when Bill Campbell and I began to explore the idea of establishing a summer program for disadvantaged students from the inner city. Our original intention was to conduct an academic strengthening and enrichment program for the duration of the Gilman Summer School. Our thinking had not progressed to a consideration of academic year follow-up, nor did we originally envision working with the same youngsters for more than one summer session. As later developments unfolded, and we became exposed to other programs and new ideas, we realized that one short summer experience on the Gilman campus might do more harm than good. When you try to open a door for someone, you have to keep the door open and to make secure the gains in terms of motivation and new excitement.

Originally we asked the Office of Economic Opportunity for information and possible funds, and they directed us to the Baltimore Community Action Agency. We were told that the chances of obtaining funds locally were not good because of a cutback in appropriations, and we decided to go to Washington to talk with Upward Bound. Even though they could not be encouraging, we decided to submit a proposal. It worked out that we were among the last programs to be funded by O.E.O.

The criteria set up by Upward Bound provided us with our greatest enlightenment. Their program requires consecutive summer sessions and academic year follow-up. Once a student enrolls in Upward Bound, he remains a part of it until he enters college or some form of post-secondary school education. Increasingly we realize the good sense of this criterion.

Actually we differ from most Upward Bound plans in two basic respects. We are non-boarding, whereas the vast majority of over two hundred and twenty programs throughout the nation are residential in the summer. Secondly, we begin with youngsters who have just completed the eighth grade, while most other plans begin with students who have completed the ninth or tenth grades. We believe that the non-residential plan may be superior to the residential, since the students must integrate their new experiences with those of their home environment on a daily basis. In addition, the members of our staff can visit the

homes of our students and also have parents and guardians visit the school. We were able to invite the parents to an evening picnic and to our closing exercises at the conclusion of the summer session. The opportunity for continued interest and communication is greatly enhanced.

Although our belief concerning the starting of Upward Bound at the eighth grade is still in the realm of theory, we strongly favor this approach. We definitely feel that some of the boys whom we were able to enroll in our program this past summer as eighth graders would have been lost permanently to any educational system two years hence. This is especially true since we purposely selected candidates with academic promise who had not been producing up to their potential. In some cases we may not be successful in influencing them to continue their education, but we feel we have a much better chance with the earlier start.

Gilman's location in the greater Baltimore area has proven to be invaluable. The school is truly an urban community school, and our opportunities both to carry on a program such as this and to involve members of our own student body and staff have been greatly aided by our close proximity to the inner city. Involvement in this program has provided all staff members, including teachers, administrators, and students aides, with great insight into what is happening, and not happening, in the large city community today. It is difficult to conceive of a more important educational opportunity for those involved from the Gilman School.

When we selected the name "Operation Challenge," we hardly realized at the time how prophetic a name we had chosen. Our original thought was that we the staff, and the school would be "challenging" the students who became involved in the program. It is our earnest hope that we have done so, and we have reason to believe that we have. We can point to our attendance record which averaged 49.5 per day (out of a total of 51) as one indication of the boys' interest and enthusiasm. On one occasion a boy who missed the bus walked to Gilman from Franklin Street. We can also point to many of their written responses and their desire to participate in the activities offered by the program. Nevertheless, we realize that permanent effects cannot yet be measured.

Whether we call it "ripple effect" or "feedback," every staff member has come to the realization that he has been challenged in a variety of ways. And through challenge has come a broadening and a maturation, the degree of which was hardly anticipated. Not only have we learned from our fifty-one boys, but our constant attempts to find better methods and approaches to reach our students

Operation Challenge 1967—Students and Instructors.



have provided one of the best learning experiences we as teachers could ever have. In some cases we threw the book away, because we had to. The book method alone had not reached the great majority of our students to date, and it was up to us to utilize all the creative and imaginative energies we could to find other ways. The search has yet to end, and, if we are "worth our salt," it really should never end. We find ourselves cultivating the belief that there is always a better way in all teaching.

It was not surprising to find a Mathematics class shooting baskets on the playground and taking averages. Nor was it unusual to pass by a Humanities class and witness a mock trial or debate in progress. And it was not strange to find a teacher sending his class to the woods to see what they could observe with instructions to return and write about it. One delightful youngster wrote the following as a result of observing a blade of grass:

There is a piece of grass blowing in the wind. It blows swiftly as if it has no care in the world. It stands over the other pieces of grass like a goddess of life. I couldn't say that it was beautiful, but it seemed to have eyes looking dead at mine. It stopped a moment as if to describe to another piece of grass the way I look. Then they seemed to be arguing about my appearance. It also looked like a mother and her young gathered around to listen to a story. Finally it stopped as if it were lying down to sleep.

— Carroll Eades

Since we had a small faculty, it was possible for us to confer frequently. Certainly one of the most rewarding and stimulating experiences was our work together. There is no question in our minds that the considerable diversity of the members of our staff in terms of racial and socio-economic background and experience contributed greatly to the creativity and imagination in the development of our entire program.

Tutoring



In Mathematics, Frank Pine from the Gilman Faculty and William Greene, a teacher from Gwynns Falls Junior High, worked closely together to develop two variations of a pre-algebra course designed both to enrich and to prepare our students for the public school ninth-grade program. In our Humanities program, two Gilman English teachers, Jerry Downs and Bill Andrews, teamed with Mrs. Francis West, a teacher from Booker T. Washington Junior High School, to produce a varied program of experiences in speaking, writing, reading, discussing, and listening. One of our most prized possessions is a printed collection of at least one writing from each of our students produced during the summer session.

In addition to academic offerings, our program included Art and Drama-Music. Jim Riley, our Gilman Art teacher, offered a diverse program of creative art which culminated in the making of three eight-foot "monsters" which were displayed at our summer closing exercise along with other objects created by the boys. Mr. Riley is continuing an Art program in our academic year follow-up for all of our students who have demonstrated an interest.



Art project.



On stage



English class. Mr. Andrews.

David Allan, Gilman '65 and now at Randolph-Macon College, and Miss Jennie Williams, Bradford College '67 and presently enrolled in the University of North Carolina, collaborated in the development of a Drama-Music program that offered opportunities for free expression through role playing, studio acting, dancing, and exposure to different types of music. The two original productions that were presented as part of our closing exercises were amazingly good. The enthusiasm and imagination of David and Jennie along with that of the irreplaceable student aides is largely responsible for this success.

One of the most valuable aspects of the program was that our teachers had considerable contact with the students outside of the classroom as well as within. From the beginning we knew that we must gain the confidence of our students by sharing experiences. We ate together and attended various functions such as plays

and baseball games in a group. Only in this way can we hope to have any success encouraging these youngsters to take advantage of their educational opportunities and to realize their potential. In our efforts to further understand and help our students, we asked Lynn Jones, a Guidance Counselor from Gwynns Falls Junior High, to work in the program. Mr. Jones interviewed each youngster at length and was able to gather additional information relative to family background and home life on each boy. In several cases we were able to be of immediate personal assistance as a result of this counseling.

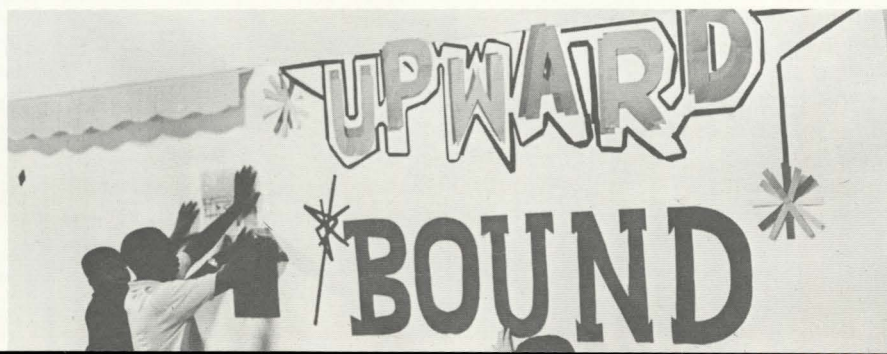
It would be a gross oversight to go further without mentioning the extremely important part our student aides have played in Operation Challenge. Thirteen members of Gilman's Class of 1968 have served as tutors, counselors, and friends to our students.* During the formal summer session, these seniors attended classes with their advisees, they helped them with their work, they participated with them in the athletic program, and they accompanied them on field trips. The aides are now involved in our academic year follow-up program as part of a tutorial team and our bi-weekly Saturday reunions. In addition, they have visited the homes of their advisees on occasion, and in some instances advisees have visited the homes of aides. We expect to have present Gilman juniors begin to work into the program soon so that they will be prepared to assume the full responsibilities of student aides next summer.

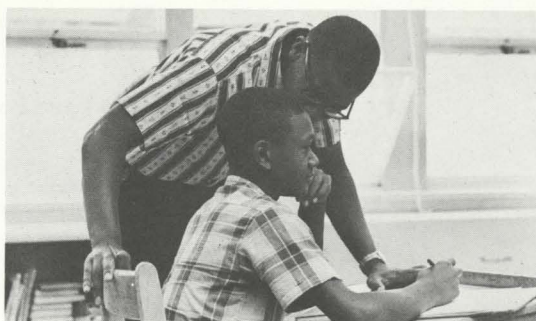
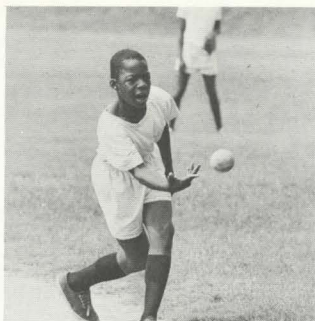
While mentioning people who have contributed to the program, we must mention the school's financial secretary, Mrs. Rhea Zinkand. Not only has she kept us within our budget, but she assumed the tedious job of maintaining detailed financial records. We are also indebted to Mrs. Gladys Anderson and her kitchen staff for the wonderful lunches we were provided during the summer session. A number of our students gained weight, and if you had witnessed the consumption of food, you would understand why.

In conclusion, one might ask the question, "Where do we go from here?" Obviously we stick with these original fifty-one youngsters and do all that we can to help them fulfill their individual potentials and to become contributing members of our community. They have demonstrated by their eager response to Operation Challenge that they can so benefit. From the standpoint of the Gilman School, we sincerely hope to continue our commitment to this program. Not only do we have a chance to fulfill our responsibility as a community school, but we can reap the rewards of the enlightenment of our Gilman student body and staff in the ways of social concern and understanding. In this as in other important efforts, we find that in helping others, we help ourselves.

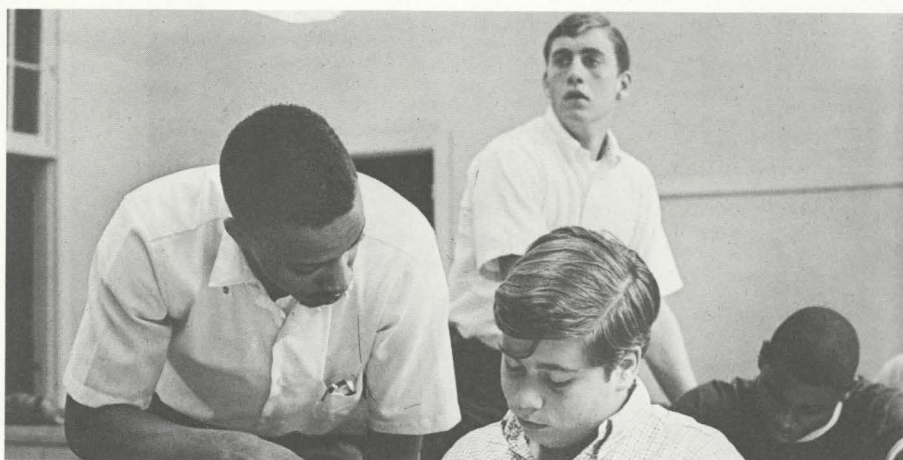
As a final personal note, let me say that this has been one of the most meaningful experiences that I have ever been involved in. I believe that I am reflecting the sentiments of our entire staff. We are most grateful to our Headmaster, to the Board of Trustees, and to the School for giving us this opportunity.

*Jerry Brown, Bill Downes, Greg Emery, Bob Green, Andy Harper, Andy Hirsch, Allen Kirby, Philip Lehr, David Robinson, Stuart Simms, Tom Ward, David Whitman, Willard Wiggins.

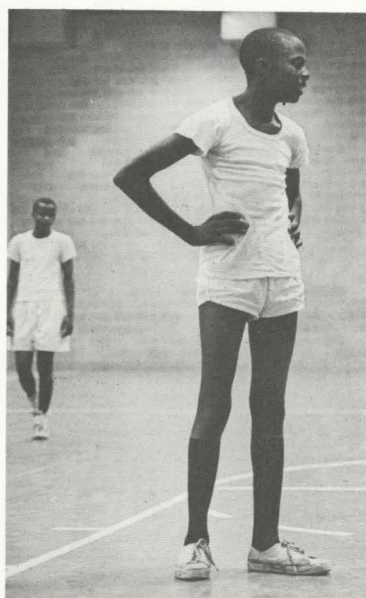




Greg Emery, '68, standing.



Math class. Mr. William Greene and Philip Lebr, standing.



Lunch

OPERATION CHALLENGE

A Classroom Teacher's View

BY A. J. DOWNS

Mr. Downs taught English in the program last summer.

Our two primary, conscious concerns, this first summer, were (a) to make the work fun, to make the boys *want* to do it, and (b) to convince them that we *cared* for them as people. Indeed, it is my conviction that these should be the central concerns of *all* education, and that teachers in schools like Gilman, where middle-class children with built-in motivation allow us to *make* them do whatever we wish, can easily fall prey to the false notion that "If I tell them to do it, it must be right." But that is a different story. In Upward Bound, if we "turn the kids off," they don't come back. We don't have any *choice* but to make them like the work—no choice but to love them. It brings out the best in teachers.

Some examples from my English class (We called it "Humanities," so that they wouldn't have preconceptions.):

One day, the noise from the bulldozers and roadgraders outside was so great no one could hear. I asked the kids to pretend they were Martians, just landed from a space ship, and that their mission was to write "reports" to Martian headquarters, explaining what they saw. They wandered around outside for half an hour, making notes and then polishing their reports. You can see what some of them wrote, in the school magazine. One "Martian," for example, identified the *machines* as "Earthlings," and suggested to headquarters that an expedition be sent down with gifts of "food" for the Earthlings, who would then rise up and destroy the "little people" who had enslaved them. It is clear, vivid writing because, I am convinced, it was fun to do.

After they read Saki's short story *The Open Window*, I asked each boy to make up a story like it. The three best stories were turned into plays and performed for the rest of the class.

At the halfway point, I asked what *they* wanted to do for the rest of the time; they agreed that they wanted to study grammar! (One learns to expect surprises in classrooms, but this one rendered me speechless.) It was their favorite work for the rest of the course; they went at it with gleeful intensity, in large part, I believe, because it was their own idea.

I think it is safe to say that we are over the first small hurdle. (There are hundreds ahead; we shall not clear them all so easily.) The boys have actually enjoyed learning a few things. They think they might enjoy learning a few more. They actually are beginning to believe, very deep down, so deep that they dare not put it in words, even to themselves (They have been disappointed before.); that perhaps, just perhaps, there *is* a way out, that maybe they really *can* go to college, and that apparently, and in spite of all that their previous experience leads them to expect, these teachers and Gilman seniors really do care for them and want to help.

I suppose it does not seem like very much. To me, after six weeks with these kids, it is a rainbow, an explosion of hope.