

## *Educationally Deprived Youth*

ROBERT J. HAVIGHURST

*"The educational gap between the educated and fully utilized and the undereducated and underutilized is greater than at any period in history," according to the Report of the Joint USDA/NASULGC Extension Study Committee.<sup>1</sup> The Committee states that Extension must give increased attention to the underutilized, the less advantaged. This group, including both youth and adults, is identified as one of two key priority groups for Extension in the "quality of living" program area. However, the Committee makes clear that it views Extension as an educational agency, not a welfare agency. If Extension, then, is to deal with disadvantaged young people in an educational sense it will be necessary to understand more clearly their nature and potential. Even though most of the evidence on educationally disadvantaged youth is in relationship to formal schooling, these insights can be useful to Extension. In fact, some of the implications may be more specific to Extension type efforts than to the formal classroom. This possibility is revealed by the analysis developed in this paper.—The editor.*

EDUCATORS are trying to find better ways of teaching a group of children and youth who are variously called culturally deprived, ed-

<sup>1</sup> *A People and a Spirit*, A Report of the Joint USDA/NASULGC Extension Study Committee (Fort Collins, Colorado: Printing and Publications Service, Colorado State University, November, 1968). See Lowell H. Watts, "Extension's Future—A National Report," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, VI (Winter, 1968), 199-206, for an outline of the major thrusts of the recommendations of this report.

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educationally deprived, or socially disadvantaged. This is a major movement; it enlists a large amount of money and time of skilled teachers, and considerable research effort. There is consensus that this group of children and their families present perhaps the greatest of our domestic social problems. It is important that the problem be seen clearly.

This paper will deal with two levels of educational deprivation. One level will be referred to as "severe," the other as "partial." The opportunities and problems that working with these two groups present suggest the desirability of treating them separately.

### **The Severely Deprived**

The socially disadvantaged may be described in three ways: (1) in terms of certain family characteristics relating directly to the child; (2) in terms of their personal characteristics; or (3) in terms of the social group characteristics of their families.

#### *Family Characteristics*

Compared with children whose families give them average or better advantages for getting started in modern urban life, the socially disadvantaged child lacks several of the following:

1. A family conversation which: answers his questions and encourages him to ask questions; extends his vocabulary with new words and with adjectives and adverbs; gives him a right and a need to stand up for and to explain his point of view on the world.
2. A family environment which: sets an example of reading; provides a variety of toys and play materials with colors, sizes, and objects that challenge his ingenuity with his hands and his mind.
3. Two parents who: read a good deal; read to him; show him that they believe in the value of education; reward him for good school achievement.

From studies of language behavior of families as it relates to the intellectual development of their children, Bernstein<sup>2</sup> distinguishes between two forms or types of language. One form is called *restricted*; the other, *elaborated*. A family which employs restricted language gives a child a language environment characterized by:

<sup>2</sup>Basil Bernstein, "Language and Social Class," *British Journal of Sociology*, XI (1960), 271-76; "Social Class and Linguistic Development. A Theory of Social Learning," in A. H. Halsey, J. Floud, and C. A. Anderson (eds.), *Economy, Education and Society* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), pp. 288 ff.

1. Short, grammatically simple, often unfinished sentences.
2. Simple and repetitive use of conjunctions (so, then, because).
3. Little use of subordinate clauses.
4. Rigid and limited use of adjectives and adverbs.
5. Infrequent use of "I" and "me"; frequent use of other personal pronouns.
6. A large number of phrases which signal a requirement for the previous speech sequence to be reinforced: Wouldn't it? You see? You know? etc. This process is termed "sympathetic circularity."

A family which employs an *elaborated* language gives the child a language environment characterized by:

1. Accurate grammatical order and syntax which regulate what is said.
2. Use of a range of conjunctions and subordinate clauses.
3. Frequent use of prepositions which indicate logical relationships as well as prepositions which indicate temporal and spatial contiguity.
4. Frequent use of the personal pronoun "I."
5. A discriminative selection from a range of adjectives and adverbs.
6. A language use which points to the possibilities inherent in a complex conceptual hierarchy for the organizing of experience.

A child who has learned a *restricted* language at home is likely to have difficulty in school, where an *elaborate* language is used and taught by the teacher. The child's difficulty is likely to increase as he goes further in school, unless he learns the elaborate language expected in school. On the other hand, the child who has had experience with an elaborate language from his earliest years has a relatively easy time in school, because he must simply go on developing the kind of language and related thinking which he has already started.

#### *Personal Characteristics*

The family environment with restricted language tends to produce children with certain personal deficits. Hess and Shipman have summed up the results of a number of studies as follows:

. . . children from deprived backgrounds score well below middle-class children on standard individual and group measures of intelligence (a gap that increases with age); they come to school without the skills nec-

essary for coping with first grade curricula; their language development, both written and spoken is relatively poor; auditory and visual discrimination skills are not well developed; in scholastic achievement they are retarded an average of 2 years by grade 6 and almost 3 years by grade 8; they are more likely to drop out of school before completing a secondary education; and even when they have adequate ability are less likely to go to college. . . .<sup>3</sup>

### *Social Group Characteristics*

The social group characteristics of severely educationally disadvantaged children are discussed last to avoid giving the impression that there is a *hard-and-fast* relation between socioeconomic status, or some other group characteristic, and social disadvantage for the child. There are noteworthy statistical relations between socioeconomic status and social disadvantages of children—socioeconomic family status is the most reliable *single* predictor of low school achievement. However, there are so many individual exceptions to the statistical generalizations that any educational policy aimed at identifying socially disadvantaged children should avoid relying solely upon general socioeconomic characteristics as the decisive criteria.

Above all, it is important to avoid the error of saying that all children of working class families are socially disadvantaged. Approximately 55 per cent of the children of this country are living in working-class homes. That is, their fathers or mothers do manual work for a living. The great majority of these families give their children a fairly good start for life in an urban, industrial, democratic society. Their children are adequately fed and clothed. They are loved and protected by their parents. They learn to respect teachers and to like school. They do fairly well or better than that in school.

While working-class children as a group are somewhat different from the children of white-collar workers, it would not be reasonable to say that the working-class children are socially disadvantaged or culturally deprived. Working-class children as a group score slightly below those of white-collar families in intelligence tests and on tests of school achievement; they attain somewhat less formal education. But the differences are relatively small, and become even smaller when the socially disadvantaged children are removed and the majority of working-class youth who remain are compared with white-collar children. While the differences between the upper

<sup>3</sup> Robert D. Hess and Virginia O. Shipman, "Early Experience and the Socialization of Cognitive Modes in Children," *Child Development*, XXXVI (1965), 869-70.

working class and the lower middle class are real and interesting, these differences should not be described in terms of social advantage or disadvantage. The great amount of movement of people across the boundary between these two classes as they grow up is evidence that differences between them are not fundamental.

In terms of observable social groups the severely socially disadvantaged have the following characteristics:

1. They are at the bottom of American society in terms of income.
2. They have a rural background, if we go back as far as two generations.
3. They suffer from social and economic discrimination at the hands of the majority of society.
4. They are widely distributed in the United States. While they are most visible in the big cities, they are present in all except the very high income communities. There are many of them in rural areas, especially in the southern and southwestern states.

In racial and ethnic terms, these groups are about evenly divided between whites and non-whites. They consist mainly of: (1) Negroes from the rural South, many of whom have migrated recently to the northern industrial cities; (2) whites from the rural South and the southern mountains (many of this group, also, have migrated recently to the northern industrial cities); (3) Puerto Ricans who have migrated to a few northern industrial cities; (4) Mexicans with a rural background who have migrated into the West and Middle West and rural Spanish-Americans in the southwestern states; (5) American Indians; (6) European immigrants with a rural background, from eastern and southern Europe.

### *Poverty*

The most general *single* mark of the educationally disadvantaged child is the poverty of his family. Even though at least half of the children of poor families do quite well in school, another half do poorly.

A conservative estimate of the effect of extreme environments on intelligence is about 20 IQ points. This could mean the difference between a life in an institution for the feeble-minded or a productive life in society. It could mean the difference between a professional career and an occupation which is at the semi-skilled or unskilled level. . . . The implications for public education and social policy are fairly clear. Where significantly lower intelligence can be clearly attributed to the effect of environmental deprivation, steps must be taken to ameliorate these condi-

tions as early in the individual's development as education and other social forces can be utilized.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently it is useful to examine facts on the number and location of children of poor families. For this, there are some good recent data, based on the Census of Family Incomes made in 1959.<sup>5</sup> In 1963, according to the study by Mollie Orshansky, 22 per cent of the population aged 5-19 (12.5 million children and youth) lived in families below the "poverty line." (A "poor" family was defined as a non-farm family of four with an income less than \$3130; for farm families, the dividing line of income was slightly lower.) Distribution by place of residence and ethnic groupings is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of U.S. children, ages 5-19 inclusive, by place of residence, ethnic groups, and per cent of each category classified as poor, 1965.\*

Characteristic	Number in millions	Per cent of total	Per cent that are poor
<i>Place of residence</i>			
Urban	7.5	60	20
Rural	5.0	40	28
Total	12.5	100	
<i>Ethnic group</i>			
White	8.5	69	18
Black	3.1	25	44
Spanish-American	0.5	4	35
Puerto Rican	0.15	1.2	50
Indian	0.14	1.1	65
Total	12.5†	100†	

\* The figures are estimates by the author based on the 1959 Family Income Census and on the study by Mollie Orshansky (see footnote 5).

† Some figures are rounded, consequently the total shown is not an exact summation.

### The Partially Deprived

Thus far, we have been dealing with "severe" educational deprivation, the kind that sets an upper limit of about 95 to the measured IQ of children raised in a severely disadvantaged family. The con-

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Bloom, *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964), p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> See Mollie Orshansky, "Counting the Poor: Another Look at the Poverty Profile," *Social Security Bulletin*, XXVIII (January, 1965), 3-29; U.S. Census, *Family Income, 1959*; Alan R. Bird, *Poverty in Rural Areas in the United States*, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Economics Report 63, November, 1965.

sensus of students of educational deprivation is that youth who come to high school age with this level of academic achievement have very little chance of improving enough to graduate.

For those who wish to expand educational opportunity at the high school and college levels, another level of deprivation is more important. It is not as severe as the one just described—at least not as severe in its effects on school achievement and ability to learn school material. This “partially deprived” group shows a measured IQ of about 95 to 110, and succeeds in getting average school grades if motivated to succeed in school. Many are not motivated for school success; they drop out without completing high school. This is an extremely important group, from the point of view of its potential contribution to the health and productivity of our society. Upward Bound students and those for the various projects for high school dropouts (the store-front academies and some of the Job Corps members) are recruited from this group.

The size of this group is hard to estimate, since its members generally tend to be lost in the mass of pupils—they tend to be fairly well adjusted to school and community. The writer would estimate that some 15 per cent of an age group fall into this “partially deprived” category. They could graduate from high school if they wished to and had skillful teaching. Most of them could do adequate work in the first two years of college.

Usually the members of this group can be discovered with the help of teachers who pick them out as having more potential ability than their mediocre school record suggests. They show superior initiative, or they do very good work in an area of special interest. For example, the Kansas City Metropolitan Area Talent Search has been working with such young people for several years. They are selected in the 9th or 10th grade. They and their parents are given special attention from counselors. The pupils are given special summer school opportunities, including an intensive six-week college orientation course immediately after graduation from high school.

The record of this and other similar projects is that about half of these college entrants finish a four-year course, about the same as the general college-completion rate in this country.

The learning ability of this group is adequate for high school graduation and junior college work. Their measured IQ of 95 to 110 is at least 10 points below what it would have been if they had been brought up in families that provided a stimulating environment for intellectual development. Their potential learning level therefore is at the 105 to 120 IQ level. They can learn at this level if they have adequate stimulative assistance.

### *The Central Problem*

The problem with this group of young people is lack of motivation rather than lack of ability. If they *want* to succeed in school or college, they will *try* to learn. Some boys who do not learn in school nevertheless learn to play basketball, and girls who do not learn in school learn to dance very well. Both accomplishments require practice, as well as bodily coordination. These boys and girls spend hours practicing what they want to learn.

Small, informal schools and classes springing up in the inner city appear to be accomplishing more with disadvantaged youth than do the conventional schools. For example, the "street academies" of New York City appear to be working successfully with some high school dropouts and failing students. These "academies" are now part of the Urban League's Education and Youth Incentives Program and are described in articles in *The Urban Review* for February, 1968 (by Chris Tree) and in the December 19, 1968 issue of the *Wall Street Journal*. Herbert Kohl taught a sixth grade class in Harlem with a kind of freedom and spontaneity that seems to have motivated many of his pupils to care about their school work. Perhaps it is significant that he did relatively little drilling, and did not bother to correct spelling and grammar. In fact, he drew criticism from his supervisors because he did not emphasize mental skills in the usual way.

A recent experiment in tutoring seems to have succeeded through its motivational value, in spite of the fact that the wave of tutoring projects of a few years back has been a disappointment. The conventional tutoring project puts college students or middle-class adults in the role of tutor to inner-city pupils. But the experiment undertaken by Robert Cloward of Rhode Island University used tutors only a little bit older and more skilled than the pupils being tutored. He used 11th graders of below average reading ability in slum areas as tutors to middle-grade pupils in slum schools. In a carefully designed experiment both tutees and tutors gained in reading achievement more than their controls did. These results can best be understood in terms of a "will to learn" that was increased in this situation.

Some important social-psychological studies on academic motivation currently underway are suggesting that most children of the lower working class can be taught more effectively by somewhat different methods of setting lessons, giving approval, and correcting work than the methods that work best with middle-class children. It should be possible soon to show teachers of disadvantaged children

how they can best teach, with methods no more difficult than the methods that are best used with middle-class children.<sup>6</sup>

Assuming that we can and will learn more effective methods of teaching disadvantaged children through research on motivation, what chance is there that these methods will be quickly and widely adopted? Here we meet the obstacle of bureaucratic resistance to change.

### Conclusion

The distinction between the partially and severely deprived boy or girl is an important one for people who are attempting to expand educational opportunity for young people of high school and college age. The severely disadvantaged are generally two to three years retarded in reading level when they reach high school age. They have had so much failure in school that they have extremely negative attitudes toward school and what it can do for them. Consequently, the best social policy is to work with these young people before they reach high school age—and preferably in their pre-school years and in early primary grades. By systematic and well-organized compensatory education, it is now regarded as possible to reduce by half the number of children who are educationally retarded as much as two or three years by the time they are 13 or 14 years old.

There is a substantial though poorly defined group of partially deprived young people who can be helped toward high school completion and college entrance. Probably 15 per cent of an age group would fall into this category. They tend to come from families in the lower half of the income distribution. They also tend to come from minority group families. Systematic work organized on a statewide basis can probably succeed in discovering and assisting a considerable number of these young people.

<sup>6</sup> Irwin Katz, "The Socialization of Academic Motivation in Minority Group Children," in David Levine (ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1967* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), pp. 133-40.