

Helping Culturally Handicapped Children

ONE advantage of a midwestern community with a population of 45,000 is the low mobility of its people. When they move, they usually do so within the same geographical areas.

After the University of Chicago's Committee on Human Development conducted observational studies of children in several communities, this fact helped the Committee decide that Quincy, Illinois, met the requirements for an extensive research project. Other studies have tested children, predicted their future maladjustments or talents, and observed their development. Characteristically, children were studied, but not helped.

The task of this project, named the Quincy Youth Development Project, was to discover more effective methods of helping the small city community prevent maladjustment and develop the potential talents of its children. The question to be answered was this: "Could the findings of social science be interpreted to the professional and lay people of an average community and utilized by them; if so, would this make any significant difference in the lives of the children?"

Grants were obtained from the C. A. Moorman Foundation of Quincy, the Ford Foundation, the National Institute of Mental Health and the U. S. Office of Education. After the public school board agreed to cooperate (the parochial

schools did not participate), the work began in July 1951. The fourth grade children in 1951-52 were in the experimental group, and all of the sixth grade children in that year were in the control group, consisting of 1200 children. They were given a battery of tests to select the potentially maladjusted and potentially talented children. Comparable records were kept on these two groups for ten years, until June 1961, after which evaluations were made of the adult life pattern of each child. The efforts of the project staff were aimed not directly at the children, but at the adults who are responsible for the children in the community; and the staff hoped to upgrade the community's services to its youth.

During the ten-year study, many activities were initiated both for gifted children and the maladjusted. Some of these activities consisted of a community children's theatre group, special classes in science, poetry, debating, creative writing and special work with teachers. The Quincy Youth Development Commission was instrumental in starting the Mental Health Clinic, and many community training courses were given for ministers, nurses, teachers, and others

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Modifying School Experience

involved in counseling activities. *Growing Up in River City*, by Robert J. Havighurst and others,¹ resulted from the project.

Approximately 35 percent of the young people in this community drop out of high school. It was found they are mostly children of apparently lesser ability who come from homes in which education is regarded as rather unimportant. They seldom experienced success in school work or extracurricular activity.

Dropouts were found to attend elementary schools from areas of low status sections of the city. Evidence indicated that dropouts did make some progress in reading ability through the primary years, but fell behind in the intermediate years and were several years retarded by junior high school. Parents of these youngsters teach their children by word and action that life is one long series of trying situations to be avoided if possible. The parents do not serve as adequate models for their children in the area of academic achievement. They also do not maintain a day to day interest in their children's schoolwork.

On the other hand, middle class parents teach their children that life is one long series of hurdles which must be jumped, praising the children when they do well, and standing behind the teacher to see that responsibilities are carried through. The conclusions reached on the study concerning dropouts indicated if we are to increase the productivity of our lower status schools, we must find ways of reaching into the families to influence some of the factors which produce the incentives of the middle class.

Four grade schools in Quincy, Illinois, were clearly furnishing the dropouts and the maladjusted children, when they reached the one central junior high school and central senior high school. These schools also showed four times as many speech problems as the rest of the school population. One of these schools was approximately 50 percent Negro, while the others had no Negro children. Among the potential high school graduates from these four schools, only 46 percent of the graduates from the grade schools finished high school, and only 9 percent began college. Very few of those who did finish high school did well academically and many were unhappy socially. In examining the grades in academic subjects earned by ninth graders attending these grade schools, only 5 percent of their grades were "A" while 54 percent were "D" or "F." These findings are startling in comparison with grades from the ten other grade schools.

Partially as a result of these statistics, the National Institute of Mental Health agreed to finance a continuation of the Quincy Youth Development Project starting in January 1961 to end in five years. This extension was aimed at modifying the school experiences of culturally handicapped children in the primary grades. The data from the previous study indicated that the children, school and parents must be reached *before* the dropout stage. So the present study began with the kindergarten children. Approximately 225 children are being studied in the experimental group and the same number in the control group. In the initial testing, the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for children was administered, individually, plus the Peabody Picture Test. Test results indicated that at the

¹ Robert J. Havighurst and others. *Growing Up in River City*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962.

age of five, the mean IQ of children coming into these four schools is not greatly different from the national norm. The final evaluation of the experimental and control groups will take place early in the fourth grade.

In an effort to provide a more meaningful experience with the children, parents and school, the project chose to range widely in exploring possibilities of methods of work. Objectives of the project were more fully to understand the child, provide a richer background of stimulating experiences, and enlist the interest, support and cooperation of the parents.

One of the first ideas initiated was that of a June kindergarten. In the four experimental schools, more than three-fourths of the children entering kindergarten in the fall came to school for a one-week kindergarten experience. They attended in groups of five or six children, became acquainted with the teacher and a few classmates, while the parents also felt a part of this small group. Coupled with an initial interview by a family worker with the parents to obtain information on the child, the climate was set for working further with the families.

Working with Families

There are three family workers, one having a social work background, who observed in the classroom at first in order to help the teacher with specific behavior problems and then to act as liaison between the teacher and the home. This involved giving specific help with reading, for instance, and follow-up visits to further interest the parent.

Visits with the families were deliberately maintained on a light level, enabling the family to feel the positive interest of the worker. Sometimes this visit

was the first instance in which an outsider called without a delinquency problem to be discussed or some other involvement with a punitive agency.

As individual interviews proceeded, it was possible to work through family problems as these arose. Marie was a very disturbed Negro child whose behavior was malicious around the home as well as in the school; however, she was one of the top students in the first grade class. A referral to the Mental Health Clinic took many months of visiting with the mother, alleviating her suspicions about the initial contact with the agency, much support after she did start taking Marie, and encouragement concerning the change in the child's behavior at school. Marie was proud of the efforts on her behalf. "Today is my clinic day" became a commonplace statement to her classmates.

One parent of a child in the experimental group returned to high school for two classes a day. Several other adults started night school partly as a result of parent interviews and continued interest in the family.

Parent group meetings on a bimonthly basis started with the experimental kindergarten group as soon as each family had been personally contacted. These meetings were very informal with no officers or dues; and discussions were held around a table and over coffee. Some of the parents have a strong need for social contact with other families because they do not belong to organized groups. Most of the early groups were built around discussion which involved behavior problems of five- and six-year-olds. They were interested in knowing more about what was going on in school, what material was being used, report cards, and the changing methods of teaching. From this beginning, several

parents met with the family worker to decide what would be of interest in future meetings. Slides of the extensive field trips taken were always welcome, with parents happily pointing out their child.

The Quincy Public Library was used for one meeting of all the parents from the four schools, because much emphasis had been placed on the importance of early reading. A home economist headed another meeting with some very down-to-earth suggestions for cooking and mending. Only one school had enough group feeling to schedule a large final meeting at the end of the year. The first year this was a large family picnic; the second year a school bus trip to the St. Louis Zoo, the third year a trip to New Salem State Park and, for the final year, probably two more bus loads will go to Springfield, Illinois. This is closely tied in with study units in the classroom on the background of the places visited, and in several instances this is the first time large families of ten or more have ever taken a trip together. The cost is subsidized by the Quincy Youth Development Commission, so each person pays \$1.00 for the round trip which has averaged 240 miles. The results of these family trips create a family solidarity which reflects through many months.

Although the parent meetings were successful, they were attended by only half the parents involved. A newsletter is sent monthly to maintain a regular contact. This has served many purposes, from giving recognition to the parents who have helped on field trips and in the classroom, to the inclusion of paragraphs written by individual parents concerning problems they would like to discuss. The newsletter usually contains a forecast of what is coming next month for the children and/or adults, a com-

plete report of field trips, special classroom activities, reports of parent meetings, announcement of special TV programs, and games to be played with children at home to improve their reading and spelling. It has also served as a valuable tool in polling parents on a variety of subjects.

Use of Volunteers

One of the unique efforts being made in the project is the use of volunteers. With the understanding of the parents, children who have needed to identify with adolescent images have been visited regularly by Girl Scouts and by teenagers from other organized groups. They are introduced to the child by the family workers, report to the worker regularly, and take the child out, usually on a biweekly basis. Roger looks forward so much to his trip to the library or a walk in the park; he is very disappointed the few times Joyce, who is 17, has had to call, canceling their appointment. He has stopped demanding so much attention in the classroom and his crying (due to a recent divorce in the family) is abating.

Some college students from a nearby town are participating in a music appreciation program. They take the children to concerts in the community, but before attending, the children learn to identify the various instruments by sound and by sight. At such an early age the intermission is the limit of their endurance at evening concerts, but their discussion in class the following day is listened to avidly by those whose turn will be next.

A large garden plot was donated by a local businessman. The children have had an opportunity to get firsthand experience at tilling the soil. They have planted a variety of vegetables, and take

the harvest home. We have had some parents help with the garden. The children are picked up at school at the end of the day and returned there within an hour and a half. This continues during the summer, and coincides with a special summer reading program for the children in the experimental group to sustain and improve their interest in reading.

During the summer of 1964 a one-week day camp experience has been initiated, staffed with volunteer Girl Scouts. The nature lore and crafts learned during this time will be utilized in the classroom.

The experiment is drawing to a close. The control group, now finishing the third grade, is undergoing the same tests these children took when they entered kindergarten. During 1964-65 more concerted efforts will be concentrated on the experimental group to stimulate the children further in their learning endeavors. They will then take these tests in the spring of 1965.

Although the final analyzing of data will not take place for another year, certain beneficial results even now can be noted. We know we have significantly increased the involvement of the parents in the education of their children. This is indicated not only by attendance at parent group meetings, but by increased attendance at PTA groups in these specific schools, which have always had trouble with PTA attendance. The parents and school personnel have come to know each other as persons and, as a result, there has been more cooperation between home and school. The parents feel the project has added a great deal to the school experience of the children. Many times they have said, "Why can't we do this for our other kids in school?" The family worker has been called spontaneously about problems in the family,

indicating the good feeling generated by the project.

The children seem to feel better toward themselves and society at this time and certainly they have a wider background of experiences. Our hope is that we will significantly influence their academic achievement as well, so the end results will help overcome the cultural disadvantages with which these children face the world.

A Statement—Denemark

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school teachers. To be sure, there have been weaknesses in the processes and criteria we established through NCATE for broad professional and inter-institutional review. But the processes and criteria should be refined, not abandoned, for they support a system of values worthy of preservation.

The importance of full involvement of the practicing profession in determining standards for teacher preparation is even more evident when one reflects on the increasing role of in-service education. The education of a teacher is no longer something to be completed in a fixed period of preservice preparation, no matter how many years may be allocated to it. The education of a teacher must be seen as involving substantial parts of both preservice and in-service study and a careful plan for continuing career-long education that takes into account the rapid growth of knowledge and its recurrent obsolescence.

A major task of those charged with the preparation of teachers is that of working out a suitable division of labor between preservice and in-service experiences for teachers. To expect that such decisions can be made intelligently without the active involvement of the prac-

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