

*An experimental curriculum for*

# Culturally Deprived Kindergarten Children

THERE is a pressing need for urban educators to develop sensible curricula for culturally deprived children. Traditional curricular concepts do not seem to meet this need. Content is inappropriate and reflects the lack of an adequate theoretical curricular structure. If efforts to meet the demands of educating deprived children in depressed area schools are to proceed with logic and efficiency, then controlled attempts to meet these problems must be explicitly described and carefully evaluated.

This article describes the curriculum structure and implementation of a pilot project undertaken in Racine, Wisconsin, which represents one approach to the education of culturally deprived kindergarten children. An experimental group of 20 kindergarten children was identified. This group participated in the curricular activities described in this paper while a like group from a similar school setting was identified for purposes of evaluation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A general description of this project, supported by the Johnson Foundation and Western Foundation of Racine, was reported in the *NEA Journal*, May 1962. The procedures used in identifying deprived children were described in the November 1963 issue of *Exceptional Children*.

## Theoretical Framework

The writers agreed that both subject selection and curriculum development needed to be based on some logically consistent rationale so that hypotheses could be constructed and tested. Cultural deprivation was defined as having its most notable effects on school children along four dimensions:

1. *Language development*: Underdeveloped expressive and receptive language skills will be evident among deprived kindergarten children, and will negatively affect their school achievement. Speech patterns will conflict with the dominant language norms of middle-class teachers, thus heightening the improbability of a successful start in school.
2. *Self concept*: An inadequate self-image may characterize children raised in a substandard environment. Self-doubt or insecurity may result in low school achievement and a lessened feeling of personal worth.
3. *Social skills*: The deprived child will have had minimal training in the conven-

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Table 1: A Framework for Curriculum Development: Kindergarten<sup>2</sup>

Developmental Areas Differentiating Culturally Deprived	Persisting School Situations	Classroom Activities
Language Development	Receptive Language Auditory Skills Listening to get meaning from auditory symbols . . . for learning . . . for fun in conversation Visual Skills Interpreting interpersonal meaning from facial and bodily expressions Recognizing relationships between symbolic and concrete concepts and objects Gaining familiarity with traditional cultural symbols Flag Santa Claus Mottoes Slogans, etc. Expressive Language Verbal Expressive Development of understandable articulatory habits Using words in sequence Adapting speech to different social situations Motor Expressive Drawing Writing Rhythms	This column was completed by the classroom teacher as daily lesson plans.
Social Skills	Relating to peers Relating to authority figures Developing manners Functioning in a group Sharing Taking turns Making choices Adapting to required social roles	
Self Concept	Developing: Realization of individual uniquenesses Independence from family Realistic awareness of physique Positive identification with academic success Adjustment to success and failure situations Self-awareness as a group member Feelings of self-worth	
Cultural Differences	Developing an awareness of differences in cultural patterns Eating habits Dress Recreation Home activities Personal relationships Expanding geographical limits Expanding psychological limits	

<sup>2</sup> The list under the heading "Persisting School Situations" is by no means complete. The possibilities for expansion are obvious.

tional manners and social amenities accepted by his middle-class teachers. He will be unskilled in relating socially to his peers or to authority figures, and will lack ability to function effectively in a school group.

**4. Cultural differences:** Most deprived children will come from lower socioeconomic strata. Many will be members of minority group subcultures. Therefore, their behavior and beliefs may differ from those of the dominant groups in the schools, and will be less readily understood and accepted.

Instruments were selected or designed to assess these four areas. Those children measuring lowest on composite test results were selected and arbitrarily defined as a sample of "culturally deprived" children (Larson and Olson, 1963).

The four dimensions also served as the framework for curriculum development. The investigators and the project teacher identified skills and understandings within each area which were assumed to be vital to school success. Thus, language development yielded receptive and expressive language skills; these were in turn subdivided, providing reasonably specific curricular objectives which could be translated into teaching plans with relative ease. This analysis is presented in Table 1.

The reader may wonder whether concentrating curricular efforts upon those factors which were assumed to differentiate culturally deprived children is a naive attempt to accomplish the impossible—that is, to superimpose middle class values and patterns of living upon children whose behavioral norms are solidly imbued with the values of a lower class culture. One may justifiably question whether middle class standards form a solid enough base upon which to structure a plan for satisfying the social, psychological and intellectual needs of any man. The writers agree.

The purpose of this curricular structure was to aim instruction at those skills which deprived children lack, but which seem to be universal requisites to school success.<sup>3</sup> This may explain the purpose of the column headed "Persisting School Situations."<sup>4</sup> The criterion for entry in this column was the supposed potential for maximizing success in later school experiences.

A further criterion for analyzing the four differentiating areas was a consideration of those things which the writers assumed were expected of all students by their middle-class teachers. There was an attempt, therefore, to select those persisting school situations which required skills and attitudes which teachers might assume are taught to preschool children in the average middle-class home, but which probably are not taught to culturally deprived children. Thus, the curriculum framework included such entries as the sequential use of words, role adaptation, and belief in one's own success potential.

The preceding description of a curriculum framework for culturally deprived kindergarten children is general; however, at least two qualifications must be observed. First, this framework applied only to one-half of the kindergarten day. Mornings were spent using the recommended curriculum guidelines of the Racine school system. Second, it should be stressed that the theoretical frame-

<sup>3</sup> The deep influence of lower-class culture on language development (Bernstein, '61), on mentality (Anastasi, '58), on mental health (Sexton, '61, Harrington, '63) and on school achievement (Sexton, '61, Kirk, '58) combine to form a grim portrait of deprivation. Bernstein observes that the environmental influences on language may be the most crucial, since school success so greatly depends on that single factor.

<sup>4</sup> This phase is an adaptation of Stratemeyer's curriculum-building concept of "Persisting Life Situations."

work was useful only to the extent that it was utilized by the teacher as a guide for the selection of classroom activities. The teacher and the investigators attempted in several ways to maintain a reasonable amount of unity between the theoretical curriculum structure and its practical implementation. All three were involved from the beginning in discussions on curriculum development. All met several times during the school year to review aspects of curriculum and instruction. Finally, the teacher kept a daily log throughout the year in which she recorded activities which seemed appropriate to the academic needs of the experimental subjects.

### Activities

A number of classroom activities emerged as particularly promising practices with deprived children. The heavy use of a simple box camera by the teacher paid dividends. After taking candid shots of individuals, of classroom activity, or of the children on their many trips, the photographs were posted on a bulletin board. The photographs immediately stimulated high interest and discussion; many of the children had not seen photos of themselves previously. The teacher frequently changed the snapshots on the board and placed the old pictures in a large class book.

Puppets were used to present dramatizations of well-known stories and to project conversation into imagined characters. Since shyness and inhibited expression typified the speech of some of the children when placed before the class, this medium provided a means of projecting expression and speech without personal exposure.

The class made a monthly "newsletter." Children drew pictures on ditto masters, and the related stories they dictated to

the teacher were typed on these sheets. The results were sent home to parents, and single copies were given to other rooms in school. Descriptions of trips, personalities and special classroom events were favorite subjects. The following example of a newsletter entry reflects the typical expressive style of the children, as well as the nature of the information which seemed important to them:

I liked the trip to the building. It had lots of windows, and we could see the water. The building was in Milwaukee. The heater felt funny in the bathroom. It was to dry your hands. There were pictures. They were all different. We have some pictures in our house. There is a picture of my mamma, and my daddy, and me. A lady was putting things in a box. We saw round things in a box. We saw cap waves on Lake Michigan. They were white and went high and low. Some hit the rocks and flashed. There were a lot of cars. Some were parked, some were going. There was a city bus, too. We went on the elevators. We went up and down. We sat down in it, and we were laughing. The building had a lot of windows and steps. They had a kitchen.

In order to give the reader a flavor of other kinds of activities developed by the classroom teacher, the following excerpts have been selected from her daily log.

*October 23*—We had quite a good time in the afternoon while Julie frosted her cake. Jeffrey Bogan got hold of the mixer and Julie put the frosting on. The small problem of finding an electrical outlet led to a talk on why we needed one in the first place. How did the use of the electrical mixer make the work easier? Julie didn't know what a birthday spanking was and started to cry when it was mentioned.

*December 6*—We went to Milwaukee via the Northshore. All went beautifully, and people were helpful and friendly. Individuals in stores and on the street and in the train were impressed with the manners and attitudes exhibited by the children. The

store windows overwhelmed the children. Several said how pretty their mothers would look in some of the dresses we saw.

*March 4*—Used the earphones. They picked the songs and stories they wanted to hear. They knew a lot of the songs and I was able to better hear [sic] what they could do along with the phonograph. Omar responded exceptionally well with a loud clear voice.

*April 23*—The trip to the Buick dealers. We saw the new cars and watched mechanics at work. The mechanic gave each of them a book and we later looked at the books together.

These samples from the log reflect the teacher's attempts to provide situations which might stimulate growth in the four areas previously described—language development, social skills, self-concept, and cultural differences. The reader will also note references to the most frequent activity—field trips. Trips were assumed to be valuable in eliciting linguistic responses from children; language output could not be expected without provision for input. The planning and evaluation experiences relating to field trips provided key classroom opportunities for the growth of language facility.

Trips also provided chances for social skills to develop in a variety of contexts. Children learned to eat in restaurants and to use transportation facilities. They became adept at altering their behavior to meet the requirements of expected social roles in public places.

Further, trips provided a vehicle for self-concept development. The children were exposed to success in handling social situations, and felt positive responses from others. It was assumed that cultural differences were reduced as the geographic and psychological limits of the children expanded.

One of the most successful field trips took place when a group of university

seniors majoring in education accompanied the children on a field trip to Chicago. The only instructions given to the university students were that they should choose a child, stay with him for the day, talk to him, and be good listeners. This experience provided excellent practice in learning to converse with adults. Here was an infrequent opportunity in the lives of most of the children—a chance to receive long and undivided attention from interested persons.

In all, over fifty trips were taken during the eight months the experimental kindergarten was in operation.<sup>5</sup> Total expenses for field trips amounted to \$598.00.

### Materials

Table 2 (p. 558) presents a listing of the kinds of materials and equipment utilized in this experimental kindergarten program. No attempt has been made to list all of the devices and aids used in the classroom—only those which might be different from the typical kindergarten furnishings have been listed.

### Discussion

#### *Parental Involvement*

The experimenters decided at the beginning of this study that parental involvement would be one variable which could be controlled by simply assuming a typical school policy. That is, if the parents wanted contact with the schools, the schools were ready to provide this contact. If they wanted special help from any services provided by the school, it was provided. In turn, the school initiated routine home contacts which fell within the framework ordinarily assumed

<sup>5</sup> The project class began October 15, 1962, and ended in mid-June, 1963. The first few weeks of that school year were used in selecting experimental and contrast subjects.

Table 2: Materials and Equipment Used in the Experimental Kindergarten

Language Development	Self Concept	Social Skills	Cultural Differences
Books Records —Listening games —Folk songs —Rhymes Record players Tape recorders (2) Listening center (Earphones and distributor for small group work) Montessori sensory education devices Puppets and puppet stage Number manipulation devices	Negro family dolls White family dolls Puppets Full-length mirror Camera Tape recorder Private storage cubicles	Safety signs Family dolls Costumes for role-playing Lunch tables Rhythm instruments Dolls representing various occupations	Records Garden and farming tools Toys—cars, trucks, trains, tractors Sand table Cooking utensils Farm animals Rocking chairs Colored cubes Model workers

by schools in the Racine system. This allowed for a home visit by the teacher, a mid-year parent-teacher conference, and parent contacts for meeting unanticipated problems relating to health, school adjustment or academic attainment. However, the project teacher and the investigators made a considerable effort to avoid contacts which extended beyond the frequency of those utilized in other local kindergarten classes.

#### *The Concept of Expanding Horizons*

As was previously described, field trips were probably the most important curricular vehicle in this pilot program.<sup>6</sup> Before the beginning of the school year, it was decided that, whenever possible, the children would be out of the classroom from one to two days a week. This goal was fairly well achieved; an average of 1.6 trips were taken weekly.

This initial commitment to trips as a catalyst for stimulating academic and

psychological development also freed the thinking of project personnel from ordinary channels, and provided a crutch for maintaining a well-paced and stimulating program.

One assumption made by the authors in beginning this study was that the typical kindergarten nap was unnecessary. The school day was lengthened from the half-day kindergarten class to a full five hour school day. In spite of this increase, the teacher was requested to introduce a nap only if the children seemed to require it. It was decided that naps would be avoided unless the children's behavior gave clear evidence of the need for rest. The experimental classroom teacher reports that throughout most of the school year no nap was required by these beginning kindergarten children despite the fact that they were attending school full days.

#### *The Teacher*

Miss Eleanor R.<sup>7</sup> was selected as the experimental classroom teacher. Since her background, philosophy and attitudes  
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<sup>7</sup> Miss R. is currently a staff member of the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago.

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either to alleviate it or to recognize our responsibility to do so? Has man reached the end of his road because we excuse ourselves by invalid clichés about the poor and the ignorant?

Mankind—one by one by one and en masse—is poor in body, mind and spirit compared with what he could have, but may yet, become. Poverty (in personal income) and therefore retraining (to be temporarily competent in some new "job"—for pay) are matters of importance to give thought to in this world of increasing numbers of people faced by a decreasing need for what they have always been needed to do. Genuine understanding of man's inadequacy and effective reeducation which amounts to a daily becoming something more nearly what man was created to be are the two factors basic to any hope of overcoming gross poverty—both specific and general—by education worthy of the name.

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undoubtedly had a great effect upon the curriculum as it was presented to the children, it is necessary to describe her. She had obtained her degree in primary and nursery school education, and was working on a master's degree in mental retardation. Miss R. had nine years' teaching experience.

Her attitudes toward the experimental kindergarten were open and accepting. Her teaching style was informal, with use of a wide range of vocal tones and facial expressions. Often, her face communicated nuances of emotion without the assistance of a spoken word. She laughed

and scowled often. She spoke firmly one moment, gently and softly the next.

The preplanning and post-evaluation of field trips were marked with Miss R.'s commitment to variety. She activated multi-sensory stimulation through the use of many projects and techniques within a short time span. Discussion, singing, rhythms, cut-paper projects, taped talks, creative drama, and role playing were standard. Free play periods were not restricted to a set time allotment.

In summary, this article describes a curriculum specifically designed to meet the assumed educational needs of culturally deprived kindergarten children. A theoretical framework based upon the psychological differences between deprived and typical elementary school children was described. Discussion also considered activities, materials and the teacher.

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