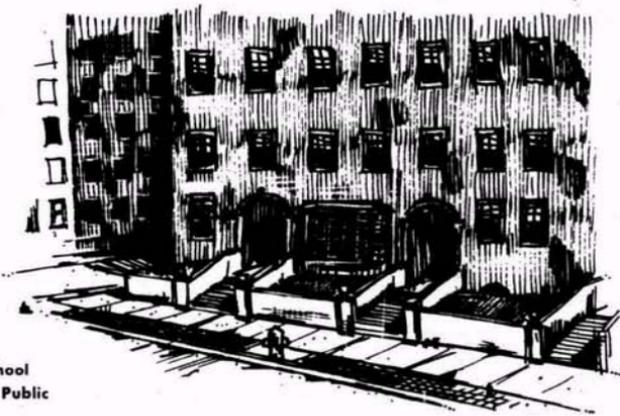


DEPRIVATION— ITS EFFECTS, ITS REMEDIES



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DEPRIVATION exists in many forms. Its dimensions are broad, and its presence hinders those persons it touches from satisfying basic needs and from developing abilities to full potential. It manifests itself with differing degrees of intensity, and one form tends to produce another.

Everyone experiences the effects of deprivation at one time or another—for fleeting moments or throughout an entire life span. In its more obvious forms, deprivation is readily discerned and action is motivated to remedy the situation; the hungry child is pitied and fed, or assistance is provided for victims of a flood. But some forms of deprivation are less perceptible; unidentified effects accumulate, and scars may be formed which become deep and lasting, severely limiting the individual who has been deprived.

Such obscure deprivations, which may interfere with readiness for learning, are the focal point of concern of the Baltimore Public Schools' Early School Admissions Project—an educational program for four-year-old children.

Forms of Deprivation

The children enrolled in Early Admissions Classes represent a multi-racial, urban population. They live in the "inner city" where there is a high incidence of low income, crime and delinquency, limited educational levels, limited job competence, low value or low rental housing, overcrowding and segregation. They live in environments which tend to limit and restrict.

Careful study of the 400 children who have participated in the program from February 1963 through June 1965 makes possible the identification of the effects of living in an environment in which families are assailed by a multitude of problems. Children and their families were studied through data collected by means of interviews concerning the child's preschool history, medical examinations, home visits, parent conferences, and observation of children and parents as they participated, individually or together, in a wide variety of situations.

Poverty

Poverty reduces the number of "things" that are available to be named, to be handled, to be identified in terms of function or to be classified for future reference. A concept, such as "chair," may be inaccurate or completely lacking for a child because in his experience it did not exist. Many raw materials of knowledge are denied in meager surroundings.

Poverty tends to confine the individual to his immediate physical environment, so that he is continually being exposed to the same kinds and quality of experiences. One mother identified this by-product of poverty when she said, "If we can't walk, we don't go. We got no money to ride on busses."

Marked limited income engenders immense concern for obtaining the bare necessities of life. Parents frequently must work long hours or spend time seeking public aid to supplement meager incomes or to provide the only income. Parents often have little time to spend with children or to help them derive full advantage from experiences. Pressures of time and problems and lack of knowledge frequently cause parents to resort to the most expedient rather than the most appropriate means of solving problems which arise within the family. Such pressures create a climate in which high priority is placed upon behavior which "keeps a child out of everyone's way and causes no trouble." The "good" child is the quiet, passive child who promptly follows the directions of adults.

One more child in a poor family can be perceived as an additional burden from conception. If this is the case, the

resentment experienced by the parents will be reflected in some way in parent-child relationships. When this is the case, the child's sense of personal worth is at stake.

Level of Adult Education

Limited educational backgrounds of adults in the family are reflected in what the child learns. Words are mispronounced and speech patterns are faulty because the child learns what he hears. Sometimes the environment teaches colloquialisms that interfere with communication in different environments. Parents may react with punitive measures if the child begins to speak differently than family members. Speech may be vague and may fail to differentiate objects, people, places, animals, space and time. A mother who wished her child to put his shoes under a chair pointed to a chair and directed him to "Put those things there." She communicated without naming the child or chair, and missed an opportunity to teach her three year old. Lack of differentiation within the environment may be so extreme that young children do not know their given names, have not seen their own images in a mirror, or cannot identify objects which are part of their surroundings.

Parents with limited education seldom are able to assist a child really to sense an experience fully. Parent and child may be physically present, but lack of conversational exchange and interaction may cause the child to emerge uncertain as to purpose or content of the experience or its relationship to him.

Concrete experiences in which the individual is physically involved seem to

be the most meaningful. Appreciation for vicarious experience is limited with the exception of television which demands little from the consumer. If anyone at home reads to a younger child, it is probably an older brother or sister who reads from a textbook or school library book.

Knowledge of community facilities is limited, but even when it exists, individuals fail to explore the use of such facilities. Factors which may hinder such exploration are the location, the route to be used to reach the facility, or the fact that the procedure for becoming involved may not be known.

A positive relationship toward school may not be inherent in the attitudinal structure of the family. Past experiences may have caused school to be identified as a place of threat or frustration or as a symbol of the unattainable. Children learn the attitudes of their families, so without fully understanding why, school often becomes a place to avoid.

Crowding

Limited living space, particularly when it exists in substandard housing, creates problems in achieving cleanliness, safety or orderliness. When children have not experienced organization in identifying and caring for personal needs, they fail to attach importance to standards that are deemed necessary and reasonable in a different environment.

It would seem that crowding might increase opportunities for communication, yet frequently it has the reverse effect. Premium behavior is that which reduces noise—limited conversation and few questions. Existing noise can inter-

fere with accurate audition or may encourage individuals to learn to screen out sound.

Segregation

Where segregation exists, experience is further delimited as people associate partially or completely with persons most like themselves. Opportunities to appreciate different cultures, to extend knowledge or to be exposed to new ideas are denied.

Serious damage to self-image on the part of both individuals and groups is probably the most devastating derivative of segregation when segregation is related to attitudes of unfavorable discrimination toward the segregated group by other social groups.

Remedies for Deprivation

Children reflect the strengths, needs and attitudes of their environments. Surroundings permeated by varied forms of deprivation may cause children to develop low self-esteem, limited or faulty concepts, poor skills for communication, limited visual or auditory perception, a negative attitude toward school and learning, and little appreciation for the tools of academic learning.

While possibilities such as these exist, it must be understood that in any neighborhood there is a wide range of family living patterns, standards and aspirations. All persons do not react in exactly the same manner to any situation, and different kinds of relationships within an environment create differences in the developmental patterns of individuals. Therefore, it is important that any educational program provide for individualized attention to strengths, needs and content.

Staff members try to know each child and his family so that strengths and needs may be identified and so that attention may be focused on methods to help each child achieve in relation to his own ability and needs. Preschool and on-going school records are carefully studied and maintained in order that the staff may be cognizant of a child's progress.

Basic to the child's success is involvement of the parent. Involvement consists of home visits, individual and group observation of the child as he participates in a wide variety of activities, individual and small group conferences which may be initiated by either parent or teacher, group meetings which center around concerns expressed by parents or readiness activities for parents to reinforce efforts of the school, workshop sessions in which parents prepare materials for children to use in school, and learning experiences in which children and parents participate together.

Children participate in a wealth of firsthand experiences, reinforced by additional experiences either real or vicarious that are closely related to the initial experience. Within the context of each experience, children are helped to name accurately objects, feelings or actions and to learn words which will describe them. From these experiences, the child gains an awareness of the world around him, develops ideas to transmit to others, gathers the language to identify his ideas, and is stimulated to share his thoughts with other persons.

There is sufficient staff to insure many one-to-one experiences throughout the day. Here opportunity is provided for

attention to emotional needs, conversation, corrective language feedback, good speech models and individualized instruction.

Staff members are cognizant throughout the day of the child's feelings about self. Children are helped to establish identities as their names are used to identify them as well as their creative efforts and their spaces for storing personal belongings. They develop an awareness of their physical appearance through the use of mirrors and photographs. It is hoped that feelings of personal worth and competency are engendered as they are recognized for their achievements and assisted with their problems. The staff endeavors to help children build success patterns by grading experiences according to difficulty when this is possible and purposeful.

It is hoped that the intellectual, emotional and social horizons of the project children will be expanded greatly as they are introduced to books as sources of joy, excitement and information.

Additional avenues of expression are provided through a variety of art media, interpretive music experiences, puppets and other equipment for dramatic play. This phase of the program is particularly important for children who find words to be a difficult medium for expression.

Habits of orderliness, cleanliness and safety are fostered through providing places for each thing to be kept, involving children in the determination of how materials will be used and stored, and by labeling storage spaces with pictures so children can independently return materials to their storage areas. Guidance is given in caring for one's bodily needs and children are helped through

individual attention to gain increased independence in carrying out these tasks.

Some Answers

Does the Early Admissions Program work? Better answers to this question will emerge as the progress of the children is followed with longitudinal studies. However, there have been positively significant differences in achievement on tests given before and after program involvement. Children who have reached first grade have scored better on readiness tests than children from comparable backgrounds and they have achieved at higher levels during the first year beyond kindergarten. As evaluated by teacher judgment, program children possess better vocabularies, better work habits, discussion and problem solving skills, and are more inclined to question and seek information.

Parents, on the whole, have proved to be most interested in the education of their children. Group meetings are usually attended by at least 50 percent of the parents, and behavior and comments of children as well as parent-initiated questions have evidenced real effort on the part of parents to follow through when suggestions are given.

Parents have been responsible about sending children to school regularly and on time. (Yearly attendance averages between 86% and 88%.) Some of the parents are serving as volunteer workers in the program, and others have actively assisted in recruitment of children for the new school year.

Evidences of growth on the part of both children and parents lead us to believe that the program is successful. Yet this is only a beginning. Each school has a serious responsibility to continue close relationship and communication with the parents, to plan for differentiation within the program according to needs and abilities of children, and to provide staff in-service training to build increased competency. Continuous in-service training is of utmost importance, for the program is only as good as the staff.

Much time and effort will need to be expended if the Early Admissions Program is to continue to assist children and parents to defeat the effects of deprivation, and if we are to learn all that we need to know to make this dream a reality. We believe there are remedies for the effects of deprivation. We shall continue our search to identify them and our work to implement them.

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