

IFs

## ON THE WAY BACK FROM ALIENATION

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BECAUSE school is the one institution that daily touches the lives of children, many people in this country look to the school for a solution to the problems of alienation. It is well to recognize that there are two facets of the causes of alienation: the community or neighborhood and the school. While it is true that the schools contribute to the alienation of students (perhaps unwittingly), the major forces of alienation are found in the family, in the neighborhood and in the community.

It is not only manifestly unfair but unrealistic to expect the school alone to deal with all factors having to do with alienation. Humanitarian educators, in the past, have attempted to do the whole job only to meet frustration, partial success, or downright failure. Nothing short of total attack, both in the communities and in the schools can win this battle. Partial analysis and partial diagnosis will lead to crash programs and end in recidivism.

Any serious attack on the problems of alienation will call for radical changes in the living and education of lower-class youth. Whether the power structures involved are willing to move is

another question, but school people should not delude themselves about the complexity of the problem nor be content with partial programs. Power elements in American communities would like for the problems to disappear with minor adjustments and minor expenditures, just so long as "Watts-type" crises are kept from recurring. Many forces are awakening in this country that give place to rising expectations from the lower social classes. Among the most important are: the claims of Negro minorities, the Federal programs ministering to poverty, the Democratic ideology, the "politicization" of labor, and the migration from rural to urban areas.

Schools by themselves, if they can make the needed changes internally, may ameliorate or salvage the exceptional, but they cannot counteract totally the weight of socializing forces outside the school.

Children from slum homes come to the school with varying degrees of readiness, with varying handicaps, and with varying expectations. Some children come with little or no knowledge of English, others with only the most rudi-

mentary language development. Others with nutritional and physical problems of various kinds. Still others with emotional problems. Some come with the handicap of experiential poverty and anti-education or anti-intellectual attitudes. If the first six years of life are crucial in the total development of children and the conditions in the homes and neighborhood are not conducive to all-around development, these children come to school with much against them. Sometimes it is forgotten that the undesirable socializing factors in the home and the neighborhood do not stop operating when the young people come to school, but continue competing with the school. Even under the most desirable school conditions, the amount of time the youngsters are subjected to the out-of-school environment is greater than the time spent in school. The effect of these factors is cumulative.

### **To Counteract Alienation**

What should the school do, if not to counteract the alienating forces of the family, the neighborhood and the community, at least to cease to contribute to the alienation of the students who come to it or even more hopefully, to become positive forces in the lives and the education of its clients?<sup>1</sup>

1. The total community must become concerned and involved. Community power elements have to be approached

<sup>1</sup>There have been schools that have attempted to influence the total lives of their students. The community schools of the 30s in various sections of the country operated in this way. The literature records that, on an experimental basis, such schools have been successful. These schools are all too rare and apparently have had little influence on the great bulk of the public schools with alienated clientele.

and committed. If cities do not have the ingenuity, or the resources, the Federal government must become involved. "Systems" approaches are needed if programs are not to flounder on the shoals of one-shot, crash programs, dealing with only one or two of the factors involved. Commitments must be of long enough duration to assure permanent change.

2. Secure school principals and teachers must be trained in social analysis and dedicated to total approaches to the problems of educating slum children. Sympathy is not enough. The school staff must not only know and desire to work in the community; they must be expert enough in curriculum and instructional change to be able to make the internal changes necessary. Many of the reasons why the schools have been alienating agencies may be traced to the principal and the teachers. Teachers who do not want to work in slum schools and are placed there become frustrated, angry, hostile, unhappy and bitter. Slum schools are seen as the "Siberias" of the school systems and assignment to them is perceived as demotion.

The negativism of the teachers is communicated to the students who react in kind. Simply because teachers have had a class in educational sociology and know that they are middle-class-oriented does not necessarily insure that they can adjust to the slum children. The inability of teachers and school administrators to understand lower-class behavior, perceptions and goals makes for ineffectiveness in teaching. On the other side of the coin is the behavior of the pupil, which often is socially undesirable and taxing to the

teacher and the administrator. A good deal could be done to ameliorate this by teaming teachers with students.<sup>2</sup>

The usual "adjustments" in a middle-class-oriented curriculum—double tracking, watered-down courses, grouping—have been the same means of meeting the needs of the lower-class pupils. *Adjustment* to a middle-class curriculum is not what is needed; lower-class children need different kinds of experiences. Except for general guidelines, such as those given by Allison Davis, there is nothing concrete to go on. Going to the opera and reading Shakespeare are variations on such a middle-class curriculum. Schools need to experiment with the total curriculum; the organizing centers need to be real and of concern to the lower-class student. There is evidence that we may be near a breakthrough on the matter of cognitive development. The exciting work of Hilda Taba has much to offer in this regard. The affective areas of creativity and of aesthetic development are relatively untouched. The schools must be provided with competent curriculum technicians if more than superficial adjustments are to be made.

The new developments coming from research on teaching need to be made part of the technical equipment of teachers assigned to slum schools.

Not only must curriculum and teaching be changed but all aspects of the school need to be geared to the new programs: the administration, the aux-

iliary services, the materials of instruction, the evaluation devices, etc. Schools have been trying to meet the needs of the lower-class children by changing as little as possible in the regular organization of the program. The evidence is that such an approach is not enough.

3. Schools geared to educate the lower-class students will need different and more services than the traditional middle-class school. Persons skilled in programming and development of instructional materials need to be added to school staffs. Guidance specialists need to be increased considerably. School social workers, the services of clinical psychologists and psychiatrists, of doctors, dentists, need to be secured—so these services will be available as needed. Buses for field trips need to be available daily. All evidence we have indicates that the life space and the experiential backgrounds of slum children are extremely limited. Libraries need to be expanded considerably and combined with materials of instruction and museum centers, so that objects, pictures, movies, film strips, slides, and all types of materials of instruction can be made available to pupils and teachers as needed. The communication media—television, radio, newspaper and magazines have not been exploited in terms of teaching lower-class children. Reading clinics need to be developed both at elementary school and secondary school levels.

4. The significance of cultural and social class differences in the cognitive and affective development of lower-class children has not been sufficiently understood and appreciated. In the Southwest, for example, the schools

<sup>2</sup> Heil and Washburne have reported an experiment having exceptional applications to this problem. Enough has been said about the fact that the curriculum is primarily for middle-class pupils. This has become well recognized but little has been done about it on a comprehensive scale.

have "adjusted" to the Spanish-speaking and Indian pupil by teaching English-as-a-second-language. Only recently is the concept of "culture" and its pervasive influence in perception and thinking and emotional development beginning to be generally understood and accepted.

A study by Ulibarri found that Spanish-speaking teachers tended to reject Spanish-speaking lower-class children.<sup>3</sup> Teachers need to learn how one culture is different from the majority culture, not in some general way, but in a concrete manner.

Teachers need to know how cultural differences manifest themselves behaviorally. Misinterpretation of behavior is thus lessened. Ethnocentric attitudes of teachers are minimized and children of different cultural orientation than the majority may be afforded opportunities to develop healthy concepts of self.

A fundamental problem that needs to be resolved in respect to cultural differences is whether children of different cultural orientations will be persuaded, forced or allowed to elect to forego their own culture and learn the majority culture. Which majority culture? Schools have in the past forced Spanish-speaking children to accept the Anglo middle-class culture of the textbooks and of the teachers as culture bearers and models. The psychological damage incurred by these practices can only be imagined. If the schools are to act as transitional agents, or if they are willing to respect differences in culture, traditional school practices will need to be changed.

<sup>3</sup>Horacio Ulibarri. "Teacher Awareness of Socio-cultural Differences in Multi-cultural Classrooms." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of New Mexico, 1959.

5. The school finance plans provided in most states will need to be modified if sufficient funds are to be made available to implement the changes needed in educating lower-class children as they should be. Even most foundation-type financial programs have never made corrections for the additional financing needed by lower-class children. The practice of raising the current-expenditure per-capita allocation to local school districts without earmarking does not protect the lower-class child. Equality of educational opportunity for the lower-class child or for the culturally different child is not achieved through providing him the same or equal program as for a middle-class child of the majority culture. Equalization for the education of the slum child means greater expenditure for him than for the middle-class child. The school must make up for the experiential poverty and disadvantaged situation in which the lower-class child, through no fault of his own, has found himself.

6. Finally, preparation programs for all school personnel: administrators, guidance personnel, teachers, supervisors and others must be changed radically if they are to prepare personnel to deal adequately with the lower-class child. The program at the University of New Mexico for training educational administrators to work in multi-cultural communities, which is funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, is an example of a pioneering effort, but should involve teachers and school auxiliary personnel as well.

Whether these and other changes that could be mentioned will be made is for the future to decide. ☞

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