

The disadvantaged inner-city child must have an educational program designed especially for him . . .

Educating the Disadvantaged: A Beginning

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COMMUNITIES within which inner-city education projects take place usually have a long history of educational failure: the residents, as a group, may have lower intelligence and achievement scores, an inflated dropout rate, and very serious problems related to unemployment and underemployment. All of these conditions are in some measure related to a lack of education.

There are certain characteristics, too, of the inner-city dweller that do not enhance, but rather impede school achievement. Any program of school improvement must, it would seem, take these factors into account.

1. The inner-city dwellers appear to be oriented to the here-and-now to a far greater degree than that section of our population that seems to get the greatest benefits from the school. It might be said, the inner-city dwellers have not embraced the value of delayed gratification seemingly so necessary to, or at least an important part of, aggressive up-mobility.

2. It has been observed, too, that children in the inner-city schools will complete tasks much more readily when they are able to see the beginning and the end as well as a means of immediately receiving an evaluation of their efforts.

3. The child of the inner-city school will probably be much more adept at handling concrete objects than dealing with abstractions or verbalized concepts.

4. The educationally disadvantaged child has a simple, relatively uncluttered language system. The inner-city dweller cannot use language as a manipulative tool to aid thinking to the degree children who succeed in school can.

5. Children residing in the inner-city have not had assistance in developing sensory modalities as keenly as necessary for success in school. The means of receiving stimuli are underdeveloped.

These are but a few of the generaliza-

tions one can make about the disadvantaged child who has been hampered by a long history of educational failure. Curriculum changes ought to follow from the available data.

One of the objectives of the inner-city school must be the *improvement of the language facility of children*. A program must be designed to increase vocabulary as well as provide continuous and sequentially prescribed opportunities for experience in the use of language as a cognitive tool.

Another objective must be to *increase the effectiveness of each sense* so each learner will be better equipped to receive data and make increasingly more exacting discriminations. Children must be able to recognize the difference between the phoneme "d" and "b"; be able to listen to and follow directions given orally; and be able to discriminate between shades of color and sizes of objects, for example.

Children, too, need to be able to make more than isolated use of the skills they develop. The increasing use of language as a cognitive tool coupled with an ever-increasing sharpness in use of senses should lead to the development of a growing *ability to observe, compare, classify, contrast, interpret, and communicate about all manner of phenomena*.

Objectives of Inner-city Education

A test of any program so far designed must be the degree to which it is compatible with the data about the learner and those objectives derived therefrom. This should not be construed to imply that the learner is the only source of data upon which decisions regarding

the goals of the program should be based. The society, the milieu, the school—and all this means—are but a few data sources that of necessity must be examined. However, we must be careful to maintain the primacy of the learner as a data source.

The major goal of any attempt to improve inner-city education must be to modify the educational enterprise for those children involved so that it will result in their having, the same kinds of choices based on education that non-disadvantaged children have now. Simply put, the inner-city child generally reads less well, does not perform in math or science or any school activity as well as suburban advantaged children, and, therefore, usually cannot compete favorably with them in American society. The inner-city child who fails in school has fewer life choices than does the child who succeeds in school.

Improvement of language facility, therefore, should have benefits far beyond those first imagined. If developing skill in the use of language does not measurably influence the development of reading skill or modify cognitive structure, for example, it has been only partially successful. Whatever modifications are made in the program should, therefore, have unity.

If modifications in the school curriculum are to be successful, they must:

1. Be capable of providing immediate feedback to the learner regarding his progress
2. Be based on relatively compact, short-term tasks, the limits of which are easily perceptible to the most cautious learner
3. Be interesting, non-tedious or -boring, and demand active learner involvement

4. Call for the learner's manipulation of items whenever possible

5. Be non-printed material as often as possible

6. Demand increasingly complex behavior by the learner

7. Lead to the development of highly structured language patterns, demanding the ability to manipulate abstractions such as conceptual schemes

8. Cause the learner to see the need for learning how to read, compute, and research for increasing knowledge about his world.

Programs in science, math, or social studies, for example, should have a process rather than content emphasis and should utilize relatively short and compact exercises to achieve specified behavior. The behavior should be developed sequentially from preschool through at least junior high school. These behaviors must be those that will encourage the learner actively to discover more about his world. The learner at age four or fourteen should be developing his ability to observe, classify, manipulate, measure, and describe phenomena all around him. The key is the development of behavior and not the acquisition of knowledge.

Effective Methods in Learning

Exercises to develop these behaviors must provide for constant learner evaluation. The student must get feedback that will tell him clearly the degree to which he is succeeding. At every age level the learner must be asked to perform. If the exercise calls for classifying objects according to size, the learner must actually manipulate the objects of differing shape and size and not simply

select from among printed representations of the objects.

Furthermore, the behaviors called for should be the same demanded in any reputable reading, arithmetic, or language arts curriculum. When the learner discovers differences between colors, objects of differing shapes, or the basic set theory as helpful devices in classifying phenomena, he is at the same time building the foundation necessary for discriminating between word configurations or developing an understanding of mathematics, as the case may be. Above all else, the learner is faced with the very difficult task of refining his language so as to sharpen his ability to communicate newly discovered differences, similarities, distances in time and space, and ideas.

The excitement of a game can be used to enhance the ability to make visual and aural discriminations, develop relationships through language, and construct complex sentences, as well as basic conceptual systems. Preschool and primary school children are especially well suited to work with (manipulate) objects as they "play a game" with a teacher and another child, alone, or with another child and no teacher.

The game should be one that engages the child in conversation with the teacher or another child in order to play. A game of checkers may be a fine game for all children to learn but not appropriate for use in developing language as a thinking tool, unless the child must describe his every move and why it is made. The purpose in using games is to lead the learner to increasingly higher levels of language development in a non-stress, low key, game-like situation.

An important part of an exercise such as this is that it should be in very short steps, having highly controlled stimuli, with immediate feedback built-in. Yet, as the learner develops proficiency, he should be able to engage in increasingly more complex behavior. He should, for example, eventually become involved in creating new ways of playing the game or discover new and similar games.

The listening center, although neither a game nor a structured program, nonetheless can become a very effective educational tool. The device consists of a record player or tape recorder and sets of earphones.

The way the listening center or station is used is, of course, the key to its success. Teachers should experiment with controlling aural stimuli with children preschool through elementary school. Children should be taught to make simple phonemic discriminations, to follow a story—both simple and complex, to listen to and follow directions for completing tasks, and hopefully to hold data, manipulate data, and reconstruct data based solely on aural stimuli.

There is little question about the relatedness of non-expository programs, language games, and the listening center. They are all behavior (performance) oriented, demand learner involvement, and provide immediate feedback. Furthermore, each may be designed so that the learner may become involved regardless of his achievement level.

The games, curriculum programs, and materials for use in the listening center must have the advantage, as well, of being open-ended. That is, the degree to which the learner may make use of the material is dependent on him. There is no finite task each learner is asked to

achieve upon which his success hinges.

The learner engages in the use of language as he completes those tasks he directs, too. The child must describe phenomena, use complex sentences in explaining relationships, and be called upon to receive increasingly more complex messages and act on them when he is at the listening center. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of all is that programs developed following these leads can be used at any grade level with any child, regardless of language facility and reading achievement. A child can taste school success and be stimulated intellectually, even if he is not literate. At the same time, he is developing many skills that will help him learn how to read.

Certainly the teacher is the key to the value of the approach described here. If the teacher maintains a role of taskmaster and assumes an omnipotent posture, any program will be of little value. If the materials developed for use with the listening center are nothing more than capsule lectures, it, too, will be useless.

The educationally disadvantaged child of the inner-city must have an educational program especially *designed for him* if we ever expect to help him achieve his full potential. We know he has ability; it is our task to help the child bring it to fruition. Perhaps these few generalizations about the nature of the learner and the criteria for selecting opportunities for learning, as well as the three examples cited, will serve in some measure toward development of appropriate programs for the disadvantaged child. However, one must caution all that what would result is not enough. This is just a beginning. ❁

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