

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL DISADVANTAGE

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### Introduction

'Deprivation', 'Cultural Disadvantage', 'Underprivilege', these terms abound, usually undefined. In fact it is almost as if the researchers themselves seek to compensate for the deficiencies of the children they describe by the introduction of more terminology and newer jargon.

Deprivation is not always a suitable term as it suggests taking away from or depriving somebody of something they already have. However, we know that many of the children we are discussing have lacked from the beginning, even from conception. Nearer home we hear reports of violence in some of our city schools, and apprehension lest raising the school leaving age to sixteen exacerbate this. Is it possible to discern any clear cut facts through the haze of emotion and wishful thinking that obscures this issue? So I will refer to the 'culturally disadvantaged' and use McNally's clear and simple definition of 'those children whose home and social conditions prevent them from making much of their educational opportunities'.

Cultural disadvantage is not a new phenomenon, nor has it only recently been highlighted. Good teachers in difficult areas have for years been devising and carrying out their own compensatory programmes with refreshing freedom from technical jargon.

However, research in this field has proliferated over the past decade and the Robbins<sup>1</sup>, Newsom<sup>2</sup> and Plowden<sup>3</sup> reports have underlined this. A sharper edge has been given to research programmes by the social unrest and upheaval in the decaying downtown areas of many American cities.

### Psychological Characteristics of the Disadvantaged Child

Some of the most thorough, painstaking and pioneering work in this field was carried out by Sir Cyril Burt and is recorded in his compulsively readable book, *The Backward Child*,<sup>4</sup> first published in 1937. Burt recalls how one headteacher described his somewhat disadvantaged pupils as 'Apes that are barely anthropoid'. And we must admit there is still a tendency today for some teachers to regard their pupils in such global all-condemning terms which neither accurately identify those whose upbringing has lacked love, concern and parental interest nor provide an acceptable framework in which they can be helped. Can we be more specific about identifying the particular psychological characteristics of the disadvantaged child?

First, a note of warning. There are serious risks in abstracting statistical types. The general qualities of the group may not 'fit' any one person in it. And we must constantly bear in mind that people who may share certain psychological or social characteristics are nevertheless still uniquely different.

So the characteristics I am going to describe certainly do not apply to each and every child whom we might regard as disadvantaged. What sort of picture does he present in the classroom? Numerous studies have described the correlation between adverse home circumstances and low scores on 'intelligence' and school achievement tests. (Douglas, *Home and School*<sup>5</sup>; Wiseman, *Education and Environment*<sup>6</sup>; Plowden Report; Newsom Report), Burt found high correlations between backwardness and poverty, unemployment and overcrowding. In general mean scores tend to be lower, particularly on verbal tests. All this is well known and requires no further elaboration here.

However, the interpretation to be placed on these findings has seen modification. This has reflected the long debate on the meaning of the term 'intelligence'. Once regarded as a natural, unfolding maturational sequence, it is now viewed more as an active cumulative process of interaction with the environment in the course of which the learner develops various mental skills as well as a bank of stored information. Therefore, as Jensen<sup>7</sup> has pointed out, the I.Q. scores quoted in the surveys sample both knowledge and problem-solving skills gained prior to the test, measured against the amount of time the child has had to gain them. In other words it is a rather gross measure of 'learning rate'.

Where equality of social and educational opportunity exists then this 'learning rate' is probably akin to 'learning ability' as studied experimentally, and in such conditions I.Q. tests may tell us something about the child's learning ability. However, if the child's upbringing has been stunted by adverse home circumstances then his relative lack of opportunity to develop mental skills will be reflected in a poor performance on the average I.Q. test. He will not have developed the urge to succeed nor the habits of concentration and application such tests imply if their scores are to be at all valid.

Obviously, the culturally disadvantaged child comes to any test situation ill-prepared and we must continually remind ourselves that his relatively poor score may reflect his particular learning experiences rather than innate endowment. So let us be quite clear when we talk about I.Q. scores, or boosting I.Q. scores, that we are not necessarily talking about 'intelligence', innate endowment, potential ability or any other such term. At best we are sampling some mental skills that we seldom make explicit. I.Q. scores, therefore, tend to be used in research on the disadvantaged as an index of how much incidental learning of general information and skills has taken place. In this they serve a useful and valid function.

I referred to mental skills the child had not been able to acquire. Before we explore these in greater detail, why has this learning not taken place?

Again we must guard against easy generalisation and seeing the problem in convenient geographical terms. It may be that certain areas do have an undue preponderance of 'problem families' or disadvantaged children, but this certainly does not allow us to assume that the whole area is one of disadvantage and depravity. We must selectively diagnose those children or families who are 'at risk' and devise specific programmes of help. In this context the concept of 'Educational Priority Area' is often misused to include every child living within it, which is wasteful of time, resources and money.

Burt pointed out to us the importance of the mother in providing a satisfactory home, rich in love, concern, interest and stimulation for the child. Over thirty years before the Plowden report he wrote: 'If I were to single out the one feature in the home which showed the closest relationship to the child's school progress, it would be, not the economic or industrial status of the family, but the efficiency of the mother. When she lacks in intelligence, temperament, stability, force of character.... is indifferent.... over-burdened by domestic worries or frailties of heredity.... the child's mental and moral development suffer together.' Wiseman, Douglas and others have provided more recent statistical confirmation for Burt's earlier findings. For instance, Elizabeth Fraser<sup>8</sup> in Aberdeen found parental encouragement to correlate .604 with I.Q. and .660 with school progress. Similar evidence is provided in studies of institutional children completely deprived of parental figures. Victoria Bossio found her sample to have a mean I.Q. of only 89, and the longer the children were institutionalised the lower they scored on tests.

Extreme deprivation of parental love and care, as in marital breakup, serious parental illness or imprisonment, has even more serious effects on the child's emotional development and social behaviour. Barbara Wootton<sup>9</sup>, summarising 21 investigations concluded there were 'high rates of 'broken homes' amongst delinquents.... various British studies place anything from 22% - 57% of their delinquents in this category whereas control figures when available, range from 11% to 18%'. In Bossio's study approximately 30% of the children were described as maladjusted, and this is in keeping with other findings.

Fortunately, such extreme examples of disadvantage are relatively rare in the context of our work in the normal school situation. But we are all familiar with instances where the mother is inadequate herself, subsequently demoralized and uncaring about her children, where she thankfully and regularly keeps her children from school, particularly her daughters as they become domestically useful, able to run the household, care for the younger children, fetch the shopping - the disadvantaged family's answer to the 'au pair' girl. And how often this mother lacks support from her husband who may virtually opt out of the family unit, his involvement being random and unpredictable. And her problems are compounded by overcrowding, too many children fighting for breathing space, play space, demanding love, attention and concern which she is unable to give in sufficient amount. She has less time for and may not see the need for talking to and playing with her children. Mealtimes may not

be a family tutorial situation whereby the child has friendly access to adult conversation and interest. Instead, a chip butty eaten while wandering from room to room or watching television may be the child's basic diet. He eats in the distraction of the snack bar, not the restaurant. The mother may not realise the importance of rewarding and checking her children's behaviour in ways that they understand and guiding and stimulating this development with some positive goal in view. What has been called 'the hidden curriculum' of the middle classes is absent, and the child's preparation for life from birth onwards (some researchers claim their disadvantages begin before birth) lacks the rich diet of varied, diverse experience and stimulus. No wonder Kagan<sup>10</sup>, at Harvard, found lower class children to perform less well than middle class children on tests as early as two years. This is not a statement that there are innate class differences in 'intelligence' but confirms the important role of the mother in stimulating, smiling at, playing with, and talking to her children. Kagan's colleague, Burton White, has found that the middle class mother who leaves 'a child alone with a roomful of creative toys all day may produce 'C' stream children as often as the working mother with eight children.'

To define such cognitive handicaps merely in terms of I.Q. test scores, particularly after our earlier reservations, is an obvious over-simplification. In the classroom we are interested in a far wider range of a child's behaviour and skills.

Still constantly bearing in mind the dangers implicit in generalisation, what specific characteristics might we expect?

In the classroom, the most striking feature we notice is the child's use of language. Burt describes how his sample came from homes whose basic vocabulary rarely exceeded 100 words, most being mispronounced and the rest unfit for reproduction in the classroom. More recently we have become more aware of the role of language in problem solving. Not only may there be a communication gap between the teacher and the disadvantaged child but the latter's use of language may also limit the range and difficulty of the problems he can solve. Bernstein<sup>11</sup> has probably linked language and social class most clearly together. Because of the nature of their upbringing whereby their parents may not provide them with verbal explanations and interpretations of their experiences, some working class children may not be able to use language in a flexible, abstract, symbolic way. Thinking and verbal planning may be rigid. Their language code may be restricted. In arithmetic the children may master addition and subtraction but probably not division. In Piaget's terms, they are more likely to remain at the stage of concrete operations than progress to formal operations and deductive reasoning.

Trasler has developed this model to cover aspects of the child's social behaviour. Not only does the working class child tend to have a shorter period of dependence on his mother, is thrown into the arena of the street gang and peer group

at a much earlier age, but his verbal and social training while he is at home may be significantly different. If found misbehaving he is more likely to receive a smack or check without a verbal rule to explain it, such as 'Don't take that, it belongs to Tommy. We mustn't take other people's property must we?' Here, taking other people's property is embodied in a general rule which arouses parental disapproval, and is an effective means of modifying behaviour where the child has a good relationship with his parents.

The possible social implications of this sort of linguistic differences are frightening. Bereiter<sup>12</sup> has described how mental skills can be 'amplifiers' or 'equalisers' of individual differences. A lever, for example, may triple the force that can be exerted. It will also triple the difference between two people. It is obviously an amplifier in differences. An electrically operated pulley, however, as long as one is able to press the switch is an equaliser of differences since it will only be able to lift a given weight, regardless of who uses it. The acquisition of a formal, flexible, richly complex system of language and thought is an amplifier of differences. At the simplest level, as soon as language develops the class differences between children become marked. (For those of school age Jensen has found that a disadvantaged child may be more like a middle class child two or three years younger.)

Another aspect of language not often mentioned in the literature but which I noticed frequently when working in an area of social disadvantage is its function in emphasising some of the aggression and social disharmony found between certain groups and gangs. The real message, as Bernstein illustrates, is often in the intonation. 'I saw you last night' was a challenging, accusatory remark, not a polite pleasantry. Similarly those teachers who insisted on being addressed as 'Sir' soon learned how that word could be saturated in lip-curling contempt.

Anybody who has ever worked in such an area will be well aware of the negative attitudes many of these children feel towards conventional schooling. Attempts to interest them in the formal curriculum arouse active disinterest and outward expressions of contempt. With their parents they place slight value on education and their attendance at all reflects legal compunction rather than a thirst for schooling. This shows itself in many ways. The child's ability to sustain attention is poor. And as Burt pointed out, when he does attend it is to the wrong things. 'Without the power to hold together in the mind a wide and complex scheme of component units' the usual intellectual processes required in the classroom, become impossible. And so the child soon tires of tasks and it needs considerable inventive powers on the part of the teacher to absorb him. Jensen found the ability to attend, far from being developed by schooling, seemed to deteriorate from the first year at school until it reached the stage where the child actually resists focussing attention on tasks suggested by the teacher. The children give way to aimless and disruptive behaviour.

Most research workers comment on the poor self image and low morale of the disadvantaged child. Whether these factors cause poor school work or themselves are a product of it is not clear. However, we do know they are closely related, and the conventional school programme offers few opportunities for the disadvantaged child to develop feelings of worthiness, esteem and competence.

In addition to all the factors described so far, he is also likely to suffer difficulty in perceptual discrimination of shapes and sound. I remember during testing asking such a child to define the word 'puddle'. He thought for a moment and replied 'jigsaw puddle'. Another child, to the same question, answered 'puddle on a bike.' Obviously where auditory discrimination is poor then the teaching of reading is going to be a particularly difficult task for the teacher.

Our educational problem in the classroom, as Burt reminded us, has no one specific cause. It is the result of multiplicity of variously interacting factors within the child, the home and later on his school.

Having identified these characteristics, what is the effect on them of traditional schooling? Is weakness recognised and remedied or does it become an educational Achilles heel that effectively prevents the child from taking part? Bearing in mind the characteristics of the culturally disadvantaged child that I have outlined, how will he progress in the school setting, particularly at the secondary stage?

#### Factors associated with school

We all appreciate the general link there is in some cases between schooling and maladjustment. Burt and Howard listed several school conditions which give rise to it, among them an uncongenial teacher, repeated absence or frequent changes of school. There is also the star pupil from a slum junior school who is 'ordinary' in the grammar school, or the child whose parents over-value education giving rise to acute anxiety over failure. One little six year old girl I saw in the clinic added as a postscript to her nightly prayers, 'And, please Lord make me read'.

The main theme of this paper is the additional handicap suffered by those from areas of difficult social conditions, whether overspill or downtown. I question the assumption often made that what is needed are simply more facilities. Instead we must evaluate the way the facilities or social agencies work and how effectively they meet the special needs of individual children in these areas. The most important single institution in this respect is the school. We have seen the picture the culturally disadvantaged child presents to his teachers. What effect does this have on them? They will probably leave.

Describing schools in slum areas, the Newsom report tells us 'there was only an even chance that a woman who joined the staff later than the beginning of the Christmas term in 1958 would still be there in September 1961; for men the odds were two to one against.' What happens to make teacher and taught equally reluctant to attend?

If unacceptable or difficult behaviour could be viewed as a partial failure of socialisation, how ready is such a child for conventional schooling? He may not feel certain things are wrong, and will therefore do them if detection is unlikely. He may have real difficulty in making a relationship with others and consequently if demands are made of him his response is more likely to be aggression or refusal rather than co-operation. And for the adolescent, the physiological changes of puberty may combine with the social pressures to put further stress on his delicate emotional adjustment.

Now consider such a boy in the context of his first year in a secondary school where the seeds of alienation are often sown. If he does have difficulties in making effective relationships, then the secondary system of specialist teaching offers too few opportunities for him to develop a close relationship with any one teacher. The school may, to the child, seem to comprise few people whom he can know well and trust. This is heightened by the transfer from a junior school, where one teacher deals largely with one class, to a comprehensive school staffed by teachers unable, because of the timetable, to get to know any one child as well as they would like. This change, from a junior school class at the top end of the school with a well known teacher, to a different class sharing many different teachers, in a school having up to 2,000 bigger, apparently more important pupils must be traumatic in some instances. Hemmings<sup>13</sup> has warned that where we generate isolation and alienation then these conditions correlate with maladjustment, delinquency and suicide.

So we have kicked away the props of junior school status and security, abolished the re-assurance and feeling of identity with a particular teacher and introduced in their place supermarket schooling. The child becomes an impersonal consumer, the teacher a remote purveyor. Bells ring and children may wander from room to unsettled room. One child may have twelve different teachers in a week since increasing specialist teaching means we have specialisms within specialisms. If the school operates a system of setting, then the child may have to adapt to many different groupings as well as teachers during the day.

Now I do realise that many children are sufficiently mature to benefit from such a system, and for them the picture I have painted is an inaccurate caricature. But for those of poorly developed social adjustment and low academic attainment then this type of organisation can only produce stress, frustration and aggression. In other words, the way the school is organised may affect the developing behaviour of the pupils. Therefore, we must look for ways of so organising the school that we avoid putting stress on the vulnerable and instead

develop structures that may assist his positive emotional and psychological growth. This is not a pious hope but a description of what is happening in some schools, and we will return to this.

If we recall the high staff turnover in difficult schools, it is obvious that more is wrong than simply school organisation. Teacher morale is at a low ebb. That teacher morale is not simply a question of staff room bonhomie and badminton after school was clearly illustrated by Kemp<sup>14</sup>, who found it to correlate +.45 with pupil I.Q. and to be an important contribution to school progress. Now how far is poor morale due to inappropriate or inadequate preparation for the demands of such an area? If you are adequately equipped for the problems you meet, then you enjoy job satisfaction and are likely to stay. How many teachers have been prepared to diagnose and help the slow learner in the ordinary school? Do we give sufficient time to preparing teachers for the behaviour problems they will inevitably meet in the classroom? This may cause agonising concern to the young teacher and wrongly handled may cause emotional damage to teacher and child alike.

Many adolescents in conflict with their parents, or whose homes are uncaring are dependent on their teacher for adult friendliness and recognition. This is a second chance to correct personality distortions. Yet it also involves serious dangers for teacher and child, as in any relationship where dependency is involved, and requires insightful, compassionate understanding. Again, what preparation do we give our teacher for these sorts of demands?

It is obvious that the teacher has a key role to play in preventive work or in accurately diagnosing the child suffering from stress who needs specialist help. Where this happens, then many a child at some crossroads in his development is guided away from the trouble, or is helped in coming to terms with a personal or domestic crisis. Without this help, how many drift into accumulating trouble until they come before the courts, hardened and unrepentant?

The final aspects of schools that I wish to deal with is the curriculum. You probably share awareness of the incongruity between task and doer. The children are underprivileged, ignorant of their social context, unaware of their dependency on others in society and the reliance of others on them - a reliance that they will not smash phone boxes, will not sabotage railway lines 'to see what happens', will not indulge in vandalism for casual excitement. Yet the tasks or experiences we provide for them to put their life into a meaningful context are often bizarre, or at best quaint.

So much of the secondary curriculum has been unrelated, episodic stories trying to spin adventure round 'A day in the life of a lumberjack', 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' or 'Hop Pickers in Kent'. What relevance had such tasks to the children; unaware of their social context, and the mutual, reciprocal obligations implied by living in a community? Since the Newsom report much has been done to remedy this sort of approach. Numerous major curriculum

projects, many of them investigating interdisciplinary enquiry, have been undertaken in the past decade. Charity James<sup>15</sup>, director of Goldsmiths' Curriculum Laboratory describes her approach; 'It is no good talking about objectives, because there are different objectives for every child.... We need constant reminders, especially in the early years of secondary schooling, of the primary school experience that children learn as they are ready.' I think most of us here would agree with the first part of that statement. Good teachers have always expected more from the bright and given encouragement to the slow. But we probably are rather suspicious of some of those peculiar notions of 'readiness' which can often be a prescription for doing nothing at all. Bruner<sup>16</sup> warns that 'readiness' is a mischievous half truth.... because it turns out that one teaches readiness, or provides opportunities for its nurture, one does not simply wait for it.' Where the curriculum developments are introduced with understanding then they avoid the criticism we levelled at the old system. But in some schools these Dark Ages still persist. And here the curriculum may provide the collision course between teacher and child. If the work is irrelevant, inappropriate or too demanding then the unwilling, the disturbed, the dull will not conceal their disdain or boredom. This in turn may threaten or dishearten the teacher – and the growing alienation becomes wider. The bored pupil does not see the purpose of this type of education (and indeed what purpose is there?) and may seek to exercise his talents elsewhere – in the market, the discotheque, coffee bar, seeking casual excitement and the companionship of cronies. A court appearance will be the inevitable consequence for many. Can we be quite sure that nothing happened in school to push him that way rather than lead him another?

#### 'Has the last bus gone, or is there another?'

Obviously we can't stop short at listing the psychological and behavioural characteristics of the culturally disadvantaged. All those really concerned with the education of this group of children feel the need for some form of intervention in this situation. (The arguments are well summed up by Chazan in 'Compensatory Education: An Introduction'). But we must question, particularly after the recent rumblings in the U.S.A. to what extent we can compensate.

There is a good deal of gloomy evidence that we must consider.

Hebb has described how most perceptual chemata must be acquired at a suitable time if further mental development is to be possible. This finds support in the Plowden Report where we see further stress on the importance of early cultural experience: 'Without at least some degree of social stimulation the latent abilities may never be exercised and, indeed the requisite (brain) cells may go underdeveloped'.

In some chilling figures Bloom<sup>17</sup> tells us that 50% of our adult intelligence is developed before the age of four, two thirds by the age of six and 20% between

the ages of eight and seventeen. Again, the early years are so important, as the Harvard studies showed us earlier. If we simply assess the weight of the brain, then it is ninety per cent developed at the age of five years.

We know little about the effects of disadvantage on the anatomical structure and organisation of a child's brain. However, histological examination of mice reared in total darkness (Mc V. Hunt<sup>18</sup>) reveals neuro-anatomical and neuro-chemical defects in the eye and the visual area of the brain. In other words, acute environmental handicap may impair the actual physiological development of the central nervous system – and after a certain stage this may not be remediable.

Such evidence as this has made us wary about claiming too much for the compensatory effects of education. Jensen has studied a group of 'retarded' children, mean I.Q. 66 and school work in keeping with this, some of whom showed glimmers that their learning ability was greatly superior to this, but who seem to have 'missed out' on the development of certain necessary skills and now function in all round achievement in accordance with their low test I.Q.

On the other hand I have seen sufficient evidence that some children have overcome at least some of the effects of social disadvantage to make me want more proof than this. For instance, Bloom's figures presuppose no intervention or compensatory programmes. We may accept that, all things being equal and providing the environment remains constant, his figures hold true. But this does not mean we cannot alter the situation. Many studies have shown how large I.Q. improvements have been noted in children when their circumstances change. Skeels and Dye (quoted in J. McV. Hunt) revealed that orphanage children gained in I.Q. from a mean of 64 at nineteen months to a mean of 96 at 6 years as a result of being placed in good homes. So the effect of early experience can be reversed to some extent.

Vernon<sup>19</sup> analysed the test scores of 90,000 recruits according to their age and civilian occupation. He found a general tendency for scores to decline with age from seventeen or eighteen onwards. However, where the men had been in highly skilled jobs requiring more intellectual work he noted that the scores both stayed up longer and declined more slowly. So stimulation and challenge from the environment can effect test scores even after the age of compulsory schooling.

Apart from our own individual observations, what evidence is there that certain qualities within the school can help a child to overcome the behavioural and psychological effects of cultural disadvantage?

Risinghill Comprehensive School<sup>20</sup> has become an emotive term. But whatever did happen in that school certainly made an impact on the behaviour of the pupils. In 1960 there were 98 children on probation and 5 who obtained G.C.E. 'O' levels. In 1964 only 9 pupils were on probation and 42 passed the 'O' level exam. Clegg<sup>21</sup> has described a school where 15 years ago the

deplorable behaviour and depravity were such that corporal punishment had no effect. A new headteacher with a fresh approach combined to make its delinquency rate the lowest in the county. In a mining area two large schools were united under one head, with a revised school system and the Chief Constable's figures showed a decline of 20% in the juvenile crime rate (in the face of the national tendency for such figures to rise).

The Social Medicine Research Unit<sup>22</sup> surveyed 20 'secondary modern' schools in Tower Hamlets and concluded 'some schools seem to exert a positive and beneficent influence on the conduct of their pupils as well as on their attainment.' Stott<sup>23</sup> working in Glasgow has shown the importance of identifying the 'vulnerable' child and shielding him from the stress for which his tolerance is so low.

I have deliberately avoided reference to the various American compensatory programmes. 'Headstart', though massive as a programme has not made a significant impact on the individual child for all sorts of reasons. But there are far greater grounds for optimism in the work of Bereiter and Engelman<sup>24</sup> and what has been called their 'pressure-cooker' approach. Briefly, they reason that as the slum child is at such an educational disadvantage, then it follows that he must learn more quickly if he is ever to catch up with his middle-class counterpart and make use of his educational opportunities. They define his problems as stemming from the inability to use language as an effective tool of thought. In Bereiter and Engelman's own terms, 'the problem facing the teacher of the culturally deprived pre-schooler, therefore, is not simply teaching concepts, but teaching the basic and necessary rules of language'. However, their teaching methods, emphasising drill, chanting and clapping, with the teacher very active in leading and challenging the children have met a mixed reception. But what sort of results has this crash programme in language and logic produced?

Although their aim was not to stimulate the growth of intelligence, but to 'teach academic skills directly' significant gains in I.Q. scores were obtained. The average improvement in the last four programmes they ran was 15 I.Q. points. One of the later groups gained 25 I.Q. points and although they dropped 11 points the following year when they were no longer receiving the language training, their net gain was still 14 points, raising them from below average to a mean I.Q. of 110.

There is also some hope in the work of Rosenthal and Jacobson<sup>25</sup>. (Unfortunately the experiments described in their 'Pygmalion in the classroom' were so poorly designed as to admit alternative interpretations to the one they advanced). Nevertheless they rightly stress that the individual teacher makes a significant effect on the child's cognitive and social behaviour. Some of their experiments underline the important role of teacher expectancy and show that when this is boosted so the child's performance may improve. This is particularly important with the disadvantaged child from whom we often

swing from expecting too much to expecting too little. Both approaches are equally harmful in the long term.

Our belief that certain types of intervention can compensate for social disadvantage is therefore not without some foundation. But we must be selective and concentrate on attempting to overcome the specific problems we have diagnosed. In this there are two issues. The first one is to identify the specific child suffering under environmental handicap and so devise a remedial programme to fit his particular needs. Secondly, we must generate a school background which is not only going to make such a programme possible but also to aid and assist it.

### Aims of a Compensatory Programme

Granted that we do intervene, does the research give us any sign posts about directions?

The clearest message, echoed by Burt, Douglas, Wiseman and Plowden, is the importance of parental attitudes, encouragement and aspirations. So we cannot stress too highly the need for the school to link up with the home. Edge Hill College runs an In-Service course specially to examine this sort of work. I would hope most teachers in disadvantaged areas would see their work to include the child in his home as well as school setting and not leave all such contact to someone playing a specialist role.

If we recall the specific deficiencies of the disadvantaged child then various guidelines for action within school emerge. If language inadequacies restrict and distort the child's ability in the educational and social setting then let us acknowledge this as a problem and look for ways of overcoming it in terms of reality, not wishful thinking. Experiments in the aspects of language necessary to break away from the restricted code described by Bernstein are needed. And I am afraid we may find more hope in the language laboratory than in many current anthologies of verse. As the Glasgow English Development Centre<sup>26</sup> reported, 'It is not the case that the average child of secondary school age is tickled pink at the Jumbles, the Dong with the Luminous Nose....; nor at Belloc's and Gilbert's naughty little middle-class boys. All this is rooted in a fairies at the bottom of the garden milieu, and its backstage Edwardian bric-a-brac of Mamma and Papa, Cook, Nurse and Governess, croquet on the lawn and family charades in the gun-room derive from a social environment alien and irrelevant to average children in average secondary schools.'

Kemp has shown the importance of staff morale. How often is this a defined goal of our remedial programmes? How often is it left to chance and the likelihood that poor morale will certainly destroy the value of any innovation?

As for the children, Staines<sup>27</sup> has shown that attempts in ordinary classroom teaching to improve the self image (so woefully poor for the disadvantaged) of the children brings about improvements in school work.

We should ask ourselves other questions. Why does the opinion of the woman serving in the chip shop so often carry such weight with the children queueing there? Could it be that she makes a warm, personal contact that is more important than the message? As Wall<sup>28</sup> wrote, 'adolescents are looking for emotional bread, not dry academic stones.' Yet how possible is this in secondary schools if specialist teaching and arbitrary subject divisions give no one teacher the opportunity to develop a really satisfactory relationship with any one group of pupils? So we must encourage schools to seek ways of extending the contact between tutor groups or class units, and teacher. And if this means delaying specialist teaching in the early part of secondary schooling, then let us do it. Unless the teacher works with his class for at least 17 or 18 periods per week, how can he establish the right bond of contact which is the only sound basis for work with the disadvantaged? Such contact time provides the opportunity for teacher and pupil to develop a greater degree of understanding and mutual trust. It enables the teacher to make a personal individual relationship with individuals rather than be compelled to treat children as a form or class. In addition, he is also better able to note the early danger signals of sudden work deterioration, inability to concentrate, unprovoked aggression or gradual withdrawal.

More specifically, we should look at the size, curriculum and organisation of our schools in terms of the children's needs. Where schools are large, then particular attention must be given to personalising the education, and acknowledging the children's hunger for recognition. Weeks has pointed out that 'the only experience we really have of such large institutions is the older public schools, the lunatic asylums and Her Majesty's prisons.' The curriculum should reflect the needs of the children, and their progressive psychological development. Those in difficulty should have special help with reading and language programmes. (Bloom *et al.*). Above all the curriculum should be relevant to these children, in this social context at this moment of time. And, as urged in the Schools Council publication, Cross'd with Adversity<sup>29</sup> we must constantly stress the three 'C's - Confidence, Competence and Co-operation. The last of these is so easily destroyed by a school setting which is impersonal, too competitive and not offering pupils the opportunity of working together in groups, of learning to co-operate by co-operating. In a sentence, we must personalise the education, encourage the good, support the weak and give the unsavoury no grounds on which to sow discord. The warning bells have been ringing in great urban centres where we have seen the American riots and looting from the rejected and disadvantaged in the downtown ghettos, as well as shooting in the city schools. Perhaps we can learn from the disappointing results of the American compensatory programmes that messianic zeal and fervour based on wishful thinking and armchair philosophising offer no solution. The glimmers of hope come

from those projects based on a specified diagnosis of the needs of the individual children followed by a clearly defined remedial programme to meet those diagnosed needs. And finally there must be some form of evaluation built in to establish whether or not the children (as distinct from the conscience of compensatory educators) have benefitted.

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#### SOME THOUGHTS ON CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Of the writing of books for children, as well as for adults 'there is no end'. But not all reading material is literature, and there is some literature which is enjoyed by the young much more when they can listen to it than when they meet it as printed matter. 'Literature' implies a memorable use of language, which will endure more than one reading, and the oftener we return to it, the more significance do we find. Much of the best in children's literature can also be enjoyed by the adult who is interested in children and their concerns. Similarly, some books intended for adult readers may interest children, and when we to think of the needs of the adolescent it is unwise to draw a hard-and-fast line between adult and juvenile. These points are important, because childhood is not a static condition: 'the child is father of the man', and 'something of the child's heart' lingers in the adult.

We are not in this context particularly concerned with speed of reading. Of course it is useful to be able to read quickly and so consume many books of information, so long as one remembers what one needs, but there are many occasions when one should be free to read slowly enough to be able to hear 'the inner voice' responding to the rhythms and cadences of language. Much selective reading aloud, usually by the teacher or by some experienced reader, is good, provided that expressiveness does not lead to 'painting the words'. There is a place for the serial and the excerpt which, if well presented, should be a sample enticing the child to read more for himself. Even if he does not read more, he will have got something from the experience of listening to well-chosen language.

Why do we read non-utilitarian matter? Why does a story, which we know may not be true as literal fact, appeal to both young and old? The answer is partly our 'insatiable curiosity': a situation or a sequence of events catches our attention and we want to know its outcome. We are naturally interested in the thoughts, feelings and experiences of others. 'No man is an island', and what happens to others in the actual world or in an imaginary one could conceivably happen to us. Again, most of us enjoy observing the ordinary, everyday world as it is seen through the eyes of others: that is, we like to look at the familiar from a new angle, or we are interested in how other people live in conditions different from our own. Sometimes, on the other hand, we welcome an opportunity to escape from our humdrum life into a world of limitless possibilities, in which we ourselves are the hero who bravely and ingeniously overcomes all difficulties, and this can be legitimate as long as it does not become a substitute for the reality we ought to be facing.