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AUTHOR Gordon, Edmund W.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes and categorizes the characteristics of disadvantaged urban children with behavior disorders which may have some deleterious effect on their learning, and discusses the several kinds of activities which a comprehensive program of guidance for such children would entail for a specialist in guidance services. The relevant characteristics are: contradictory attitudes toward self; higher incidence of utilitarian or materialistic attitudes than in more privileged groups; low level of aspiration or motivation in relation to academics as well as to some social norms; differences in learning styles, modes of perception, perceptual habits, and temperamental traits; and, hypermobility, family instability, distorted model relationships, economic insufficiency, housing inadequacy, repeated subjugation to discriminatory treatment, and similar socio-cultural patterns in the life of these children. The areas of activity considered important for an effective guidance program are: appraisal, a qualitative rather than quantitative analysis of individual functioning and environment; prescription, the planning and design of appropriate learning experiences; support, for development and learning; orientation and interpretation; socialization and politicalization; pupil advocacy, the protection of the best interests of the pupil; and, counseling relative to role choice and implementation. (RJ)

ERIC-IRCD URBAN DISADVANTAGED SERIES

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GUIDANCE IN AN URBAN SETTING

Edmund W. Gordon, Ed.D.

Director, ERIC-IRCD
and
Professor of Education
and
Chairman of the Guidance Department
Teachers College, Columbia University

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In education, the term"guidance service" can best be regarded as referring to those professional activities directed at the facilitation of decision making and development. If we are talking about school age youngsters we would add, in children and youth, but the term of course, could apply to decision making and development at any stage. Now when these processes are applied to urban youth, we could drop the term urban youth and simply talk about guidance in general since, as we certainly know by now, urban youth is a very broad term and includes a wide variety of youngsters. However, in the past few years we have come to think of this term as referring more specifically to poor children, to minority group children, to children who have come to be congregated in the centers of our cities, so that "guidance in the urban setting" might be assumed to concern the problems of the groups that some call disadvantaged, poor or minority. Whatever you call it, we know that we are talking about poor kids, black kids, Puerto Rican kids, Mexican-American kids, American Indians.

Generally in developing such a topic we find it necessary to say something about who the youngsters are in terms of their characteristics, and we can review some of these characteristics here, but at the same time it should be kept in mind that these are not characteristics that clearly define this particular group of youngsters; they are characteristics that are encountered with high frequency in particular populations, but which may be encountered in any segment of the population. A British team of psychologists, the Clarkes, some years ago looked at behavior disorders in school aged youngsters and compared these to behavior disorders seen in youngsters in an institutionalized population and they came up with a list as wide in range for the school aged kids as for the hospitalized kids. In other words, anything from thumb-sucking, nail biting, stomach cramps, to nightmares or even delusions, occured in both of these groups of youngsters. The difference was that when these characteristics were ordered in relation to what we generally regard as their severity, moving downward from least severe to most severe, the school aged children tended to cluster around the top and the institutional youngsters tended to cluster around the bottom. But in these two populations the total list and total range of disorders were fairly similar for both groups: it was the frequency with which the more severe disorders occurred that distinguished the institutionalized group from the non-institutionalized group. We find much the same kind of distribution when we talk about the characteristics of poor children or black children or disadvantaged children. A whole list of characteristics can be found, but we tend, of course, to focus on those that are assumed to have

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some deleterious effect on learning. We find the full range appropriate to white middle class, upper class, or black lower class children. We find that the range is appropriate to all groups but the frequency with which they are encountered in the disadvantaged population is greater. What is important is that the frequency is high enough for us to identify these characteristics as potential problem areas with which we must be concerned.

Among these characteristics is one involving contradictory attitudes toward self. It has been described in any number of ways in the literature on the disadvantaged, but can best be referred to as a problem in self-concept. The basic idea is that youngsters who occupy a disadvantaged position in the society tend to have a higher incidence of problems of self-concept than do youngsters who are in more privileged circumstances. This doesn't mean there are not problems of self-concept in more privileged individuals.

The problem of self-concept may be reflected in a depressed or exaggerated sense of one's own place and role in the society. It has frequently been described as being reflected in a sense of powerlessness to influence one's destiny. Some investigators have related self-concept to the child's perception of those models with whom he identifies. Given the disorganized and depressed quality of many aspects of the environments in which these children live, it is generally considered that their view of self is more likely to be inadequate and negative than adequate and positive.

Secondly, there is a higher incidence of a utilitarian or materialistic attitude in the disadvantaged group than in the more privileged group. That is, the disadvantaged tend to view education or any experience in the context of its utility--what can it do for me? Now it should be suggested that this probably is an aspect of behavior which is more obvious in these youngsters rather than as aspect which is absent in one group of youngsters and present in another. The fact is, utilitarian and materialistic attitudes are endemic to our society. However, children in more privileged circumstances are called upon to make fewer sacrifices with respect to the satisfaction of basic material needs than are poor children. For example, few middle class high school seniors are required to do without desired clothing, automobiles, or opportunities to participate in a social life which requires ready pocket money, in order to complete high school, whereas the poor youngster must do without these and many other material accoutrements unless he drops out of school and goes to work. Thus it can be argued that any difference in the manifestation of this materialistic or utilitarian attitude on the part of different classes is not so much a difference of degree as a difference in the conditions under which that attitude is called into play by circumstances.

Disadvantaged children also show a low level of aspiration or motivation relative to academics or academic products as well as in relation to some social norms. In other words, these youngsters are not as readily involved in some of the traditional tasks of academia as are youngsters who have grown up in circumstances where higher value has been placed on this behavior dimension. In a number of studies where the extent of the learning task has been modified to more greatly reflect interests central to disadvantaged children, their aspirational and motivational patterns are reported to have been modified. In the absence of such adaptation of material, they show lower level academic task orientation and variable levels of general task involvement. To put it much more simply, the attention span, the ability to concentrate on many of the things that the school thinks are important, is somewhat reduced. Some people suggest that this is because of the impinging of a number of other interests rather than a problem of inability to attend, inability to concentrate, since in matters that have high interest for these children there seems to be no diminution in attention span. When they are confronted with academic and some of the norm-based demands of the broader society, attention and task involvement seem to be depressed.

In recent years we have gained increased appreciation for differences in learning styles, modes of perception, perceptual habits, and temperamental traits, some of which do not complement the emphases that are peculiar to the academic setting. Increasingly, research evidence points to the fact that our general neglect of a sophisticated concern for individual and group differences may be having a deleterious effect upon educational productivity. We know that differences in temperamental traits can be identified in young people as early as the third month of life. We know that there are individual and group differences, probably culturally based, in the facility with which learning proceeds from concrete as opposed to abstract experiences. We know that there are cultural group differences in perceptual habit patterns (the way in which children listen or look). We also know that the organization of learning experiences in the schools does not reflect what we know about the wide range of variation in behavioral adaptations in the children served. Thus, the style that a disadvantaged child uses in approaching a learning task may not be the style that we have become accustomed to seeing in youngsters in school.

Also, there are marked socio-cultural patterns in the conditions of life for these youngsters which tend to be non-complementary to traditional standards in academic achievement and social stability. These include hypermobility, family instability, distorted model relationships, economic insufficiency, housing inadequacy, repeated subjugation to discriminatory treatment as well as forced separation from many of the main channels of our society.

Some years ago when many of us were just beginning to talk about the education of the disadvantaged as a major problem area, Reisman attempted to identify some positive characteristics in this population. Since that time others have focused on these and have even suggested that it might be possible to build learning experiences around such factors as selective motivation, selective creativity, selective proficiency. In other words, these youngsters are not un-motivated in every area, they don't show lack of creativity in every area, they don't show uniform lack of proficiency--in fact, there are many areas in which they are highly creative, in which they are highly proficient and in which they are highly motivated. One of the tasks, of course, of education is to try to identify these and to use them in the educational development of these youngsters. Despite the difficulties in symbolic representation there are fairly complex processes of symbolization in this population. These processes can be observed especially in the in-group language forms. Looking at the slang or dialects that are used in some of these groups, one observes that although they don't follow the structure of standard English, they are not correctly described as non-complex language forms; they are complex. They have relatively little utility, however, in formal learning situations where the only accepted form is standard English.

In addition, these children do have functional, computational skills. They can solve arithmetical and other problems when necessary to their survival in the street culture, in the cultures in which they live. They also show accuracy of perception and accuracy of generalization around some social, psychological and physical phenomena. If one wants to know about the values of people in the streets of Harlem, the best people to talk to are some of the kids who roam those streets. They have very good insights into this area, a very high degree of appreciation for the subtle differences between the cop you can get along with and the cop you can't trust; so that it is incorrect to assume that their perception in social situations and their capacity to generalize is absent. It is more a problem of refinement of these qualities in the areas with which academics are most concerned. They have the capacity for meaningful and loyal personal relationships, the capacity for resourcefulness in the pursuit of self-determined goals. When one watches a group of these youngsters as they pursue tasks or goals that are important for them, one finds a tenacity, a degree of creativity, and considerable ingenuity that would be very valuable if we could capture them and channel them into academic pursuits.

Now with a group of youngsters who have these and other characteristics, and for whom school has been relatively unsuccessful, there are a number of guidance functions that become important, maybe even more important for them than for other youngsters. But when these functions are considered carefully, it is possible to conclude, as indeed I have, that they are not simply appropriate for this population alone; they probably are appropriate for any population of youngsters. In fact, Dr. Passow and I have often

argued that one of the values of studying this particular area is that as we begin to solve these kinds of problems we will make considerable progress in the improvement of education in general. In the same way, for example, in the field of medicine, much recent progress has been a result of the concentration of medical research on pathology, on the problems of public health and disease. Now, many of the solutions we may find from the study of these youngsters who are not making it in the system, atypical learners if you want to call them that, will be entirely appropriate to the improvement of education for all people.

Before proceeding to these guidance functions, I should make one other qualifying statement: it may be noted from my total remarks that I view guidance very broadly; I think of counseling as only a single aspect of guidance, and, from my biased position, probably the least important aspect.

The first of these guidance functions is something that I call psycho-educational appraisal; by this I mean the responsibility of persons who would facilitate the development of others to begin with a qualitative appraisal of behavioral function. Please note that I stress qualitative as opposed to quantitative assessment. In the past fifty years in this country we have made enormous progress in the quantification of behavior. We can measure some aspects of intellectual function fairly accurately and there is no question about the predictive value of these measures in certain situations. If one wants to know how a youngster will progress through the public schools in this country there is no better predictor than, say, the Stanford-Binet or the Wechsler Intelligence Scale. The one competing indicator I would add is social class; family income and school achievement are very highly correlated. The point I wish to make with respect to measurement, however, is that we can certainly depend upon these quantitative scores of intellectual function to predict what people will do in fairly standard educational treatments. (I don't suggest that we can make an absolute prediction; I don't say that there is a one-to-one relationship; many factors interfere. But we do know enough about the measurement of intelligence to be able to make reasonably good predictions from that quantitative data.) However, what these tests don't predict is what students will do in non-standard treatment situations. If we can vary the treatments sufficiently, and they can, in fact, be varied greatly, then it is hard to predict from an I.Q. test score what the achievement will be.

I suggest here that part of this first basic guidance task is the development of a greater concern for qualitative as opposed to quantitative appraisal of intellectual and social functions. This emphasis on qualitative appraisal leads to what I like to call educational prescription rather than diagnostic classification. Psychological test scores tend to show what the child's teacher already knows, that this is a relatively bright youngster or this is a relatively dull youngster or this is an about-average youngster. In the traditional reporting of these scores, there is little specific indication

as to where to go in educational treatment. But a report which indicates that this is a youngster who responds to specific types of stimuli, who is likely to be turned off by certain kinds of learning experiences, who, if the learning experiences are put in a certain form, moves ahead rapidly, who under certain kinds of conditions is retarded in his functioning--these kinds of specifications can be used in planning the day-to-day educational intervention. These descriptions of behavior will be more useful than a reported score of 90, 80 or 110. This quantitative classification indicates a position the child holds relative to other children, but doesn't tell much about the specific operations required to facilitate his learning.

So the first aspect of this concern for psycho-educational appraisal is the qualitative appraisal of the functioning of the individual. A second aspect is the qualitative analysis of the environment in which he functions. This unfortunately is an area of measurement which has been grossly neglected in our society. We have focused on measurements of individuals but have not turned to the measurement of the learning environments in which individuals function. I am beginning to believe, and I suppose the work of J. McVicker Hunt would support this bias, that, given relatively controlled variation with respect to basic intellectual functions, the learning environment may be the more crucial determinant of intellectual achievement. In other words, if one can manipulate the conditions under which learning occurs, one may compensate for or retard the impact of the basic intellectual patterns. If we look at the people who succeed and fail in the society, we find that all of the people who succeed are not the brightest people in the world, and all of the people who fail are not the dumbest. Something else intervenes, and much of the intervening process may be better appreciated through a qualitative analysis of the learning environment.

With these two aspects of appraisal, we are then prepared to worry about prescribing the learning treatment, that is, matching the characteristics of the learner and the characteristics of the learning situation which together should make for more efficient learning. I suggest that this is a second essential function of guidance, more important than the interpersonal relationship that I have between a counselee and myself as a counselor--my responsibility for understanding the way in which learning occurs in this youngster, and helping to plan the ways in which these learning experiences can be implemented. This is a central guidance function. Given new techniques and new concern for qualitative analysis of the student's behavior, the guidance specialist can identify patterns and define the dominant cognitive style, the level of achievement, the rate at which he learns, what facilitates or retards learning for him. The specialist can then translate these into formulae for methods which suit the particular needs of the child. This approach is reflected in much of the important work now being done on individually prescribed instruction and may prove to be the dominant educational practice in future years.

A third area of concern is the provision of support for development and this grows out of a respectful concern for the conditions under which learning occurs. This support

can be divided into three areas: psychological, social and material. Guidance has been reasonably good for some of those youngsters that we reach through the provision of psychological support. That is, with a youngster who is having difficulty or is fortunate enough to see the counselor before getting into difficulty, we do a reasonably good job at hand holding; we can tell people not to feel bad about certain kinds of experiences, we can tell them what to expect, we can give them the moral support that they need in difficult or challenging situations. Where we have not moved as rapidly as our technology would permit us, is in the provision of social support. The whole field of group dynamics--perhaps more popularly known as sensitivity training--the field concerned with the application of social psychology to human organization and human behavior change is one that we in education have not taken adequate advantage of. Few of us as teachers are prepared in any sophisticated way to manipulate grouping and group interaction to support or facilitate learning and development for youngsters. We still handle this in very crude ways although the technology for it is relatively advanced. What is required is the provision of social support through the way in which the student is exposed to other people, and the way in which he experiences interactions with others, whether these be pupil-pupil or pupil-teacher interactions, individual or group interactions.

The last area, material support, is one that we have certainly known about for a long time, but under the impact of psychoanalysis have moved away from. This is simple material support for development, simple material support for learning. When social work first developed in this country, old-fashioned social workers went out trying to see what they could do to supplement the meager resources of families that were having difficulty, to try to bring these resources up to a level that was essential for their survival, trying to provide for youngsters the things, the physical supports that they needed for schooling. In the large number of educational programs that have developed for disadvantaged youngsters, few have placed any heavy concentration on a thing as simple as food supplements. Many of us were shocked in recent months to learn that even in this country there are people who are starving. And even before one reaches the level of starvation, there is a degree of food deprivation which seriously precludes normal functioning. There are many children, we know from youngsters that we have seen, who sit in school day after day with inadequate nourishment, so they aren't starving, but they are less efficient learners than they might be because they simply don't have the nutritional support for learning. It's certainly much more obvious when youngsters don't have the clothing that permits them to come to school. What may not be so obvious, however, is the youngster who lacks, not the bare minimum, but the second and third level supports: the high school youngster who is turned off from some crucial aspects of the academic learning experience because he doesn't have the spending money, the pocket money that permits him to participate in an apparently unrelated social event. For him, this may be the bridge to the more formal

academic learning experience, and in the absence of money that is necessary for social participation, we have cut him off from an academic learning experience. I suggest that guidance people have to be concerned with these three levels of support for development and learning: psychological, social and material.

The fourth area of concern in guidance is orientation and interpretation. This runs the gamut from educational information, occupational information, social information, economic information, to an area that I have just in the past year or so come to regard as equally important, and that is political information.

There is, first, the long-recognized field, concerned with providing educational information for youngsters. Most guidance people can provide the educational information necessary to make it through the usual paths that youngsters follow in our school; they can tell a student what it takes to get into college and they can tell him what courses he needs to prepare for certain kinds of jobs. This is the kind of educational information, or occupational information we are reasonably good at providing. We have not yet moved fully into the whole area of social information. Perhaps when it comes to the interpretation of the rules of society, what is expected of one, we are reasonably useful. But if we look at the way in which youngsters these days, privileged and under-privileged, are tuning out of the society, it suggests that somewhere we as parents or we as teachers or we as guidance people have lost contact, that the communications have broken down in the interpretation and understanding of social information, information about "me as being" in relation to other people and the processes of the society. At the economic level our information has focused primarily on occupational, vocational information: what do you need to function in the economy, what kind of job will support you in such and such a way. But I don't think that we are doing a very good job of helping youngsters understand what I like to think of as the political economy of the society--the relationships between politics and economics. In the past 18 months in New York, I have experienced an awakening to the importance of political economic information. Looking at the problems of public finance for public education or looking at the problems of the internal dynamic of public school administration, I am convinced that political information and the political economy of education may be as important as, if not more important, than some of the more strictly pedagogical issues with which many of us have been preoccupied. Certainly one can have the technical answers, but without the political power or political know-how to get them implemented, he is as bad off as if he did not have them at all.

Another neglected aspect in this area of orientation and interpretation is what I call values interpretation, and here I think we manage to get ourselves into a bit of trouble because what I, as a guidance specialist, am more likely to do is to communicate my values when the task really is to help youngsters bridge the gaps between the values that are peculiar to their own circumstances and the values that the society professes to believe

in and the values which are perhaps essential to making it in the society. And these three do differ. I think that we have focused much too sharply on the protection of the mores of the society, the values that we profess to believe in, ignoring the values and practices that the youngster brings and also ignoring his perception of the differences between the values that society professes and those it practices.

This leads us into a concern with socialization and politicalization as functions of guidance people--socialization meaning learning how to survive, how to comply, how to conform. This is what I mean by helping youngsters to understand the values that the society professes to live by. You learn, and I don't really mean to be cynical but I almost have to be, how to pay lip service to these values so that you can get along in the society. But another aspect that I think we have not helped youngsters as much to deal with is what I call their politicalization; that is, learning to get what you need out of the system. In the case of disadvantaged children, they somehow have to learn how to manipulate the system in a way that they can get from it what they need just as we more privileged people manipulate the system to get what we need. I don't use manipulate in an entirely negative sense. Manipulate means to operate, to turn, to twist, to adjust, to use. I think it can have positive as well as negative meanings. Referring to my concern earlier with the importance of political power, I think one of the most essential things that guidance people can do for young people these days is to teach them respect for the political power that is vested in them and how to use it. I hope that they can be shown how to use it in the best interests of the total society, but I suspect that if they don't first learn how to use it in their own individual best interests, they will not be able to spread that technique further to the broader society, just as if we don't help youngsters to begin with a respect for self, it is hard to help them learn respect for others in their larger group interactions.

There have been several important research developments which support this suggestion of the importance of politicalization. These analyses have shown that, of all the variables considered to be associated with success for the student, two are of striking importance: the first is reflected in the relationship between achievement and the individual's sense of power to influence his future; the second is suggested by the relationship between achievement and participation in resistance movements. Coleman has reported that for youngsters with a sense of capacity to influence their lives, this feeling outweighed all other factors except the impact of their home background in determining their school achievement. An example of the importance of the second variable has been provided by Robert Coles, who reported an association between participation in civil rights activities by black students in the South and their school adjustment. Similarly, Bettelheim, in studies of concentration camp behavior, found superior emotional adjustment among those members involved in some resistance activities. We can also cite the notable success of the Black Muslim movement in

this country in rehabilitating some of the most disorganized and depressed young blacks, largely through helping them to identify themselves as resisters of white oppression. Mobilization of one's energies and resources in a purposeful assertion of self appears to be a powerful instrument for positive behavior change.

The last two areas I would include concern the function of guidance persons in the protection of the best interests of youngsters, something I call pupil advocacy, or, to use a legal term, the role of the guidance person as an ombudsman. He should be the protector of the best interests of the youngster. I like to use for an example the role and function of an architect who is working for someone who wants a building constructed. He sits down with his client, helps him to decide the nature of the building that he wants, what purposes it must serve, what goals are involved. Once these have been identified and focused on, the next step is to translate these goals, these purposes into some plan, a blueprint. Then it is necessary to find the people who are actually going to construct the building and the architect helps to do this. He gets these people under contract, but his job doesn't stop there. He stands by while the construction is going on and at every point checks to see whether or not it is being properly done. He is responsible for quality control. Think what would happen if there were people operating in the public schools now who at every point in the development of every youngster were insuring that the proper pieces got in, the proper experiences were there, the proper achievements were arrived at, that the youngster had developed the kind of foundation which was necessary to support the developing superstructure. I'm thinking now of this as the role of guidance people in the protection of the best interests of youngsters: pupil advocacy, the pupil ombudsman. This, incidentally, does not involve the guidance person in a large amount of personal counseling but in a large amount of consultation with a wide variety of people: consultation with school administrators about the organizational structure of the school, consultation with teachers about the learning needs and the learning experiences that are likely to be most appropriate for this youngster, consultation with parents and community people, consultation with other youngsters who may need to be organized in certain ways to provide certain kinds of experiences or a supporting climate.

Finally, the last of these guidance functions is the counseling role, and here I think the guidance counselor ought to be involved in that counseling that has to do with role choice. In his counseling role, the guidance counselor helps the young person to face the questions: who am I? what can I become? how can I become it? I don't think that we are prepared nor do we have the time nor should we be involved in concern with the treatment of psycho-pathology. Those of us let ourselves become the troubleshooters for the school, that is, the people who handle the disturbed or disturbing youngsters, I think are doing the field and those youngsters a disservice because few of us are trained to function in that way. Our

counseling functions have to do with role determination, role choice, and the discovery of answers to questions related to role identification and role achievement.

Counseling in the guidance area, I believe, should be generally limited to this and should involve a very small proportion of the counselor's time. I would say that most of his time, particularly for a population such as that which we are considering, should be devoted to the remaining categories of work I have mentioned. This means that a comprehensive program of guidance for the urban disadvantaged student would involve the specialist in these several kinds of activities: appraisal, a qualitative rather than quantitative analysis of individual functioning and environment; prescription, the planning and design of appropriate learning experiences; support, for development and learning, psychological, social and material; orientation and interpretation with respect to a wide variety of kinds of information and values; socialization, the development of appreciation for what it takes to survive in the society; and also, as important if not more so, politicalization, learning how to get what one needs from the system; pupil advocacy, the protection of the best interests of the pupil; and finally, counseling relative to role choice and implementation. To the extent that we as guidance specialists can perform all these functions effectively for the urban disadvantaged child, not only will life for these children be greatly improved but guidance and education for all children will be significantly advanced.

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