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ABSTRACT

What kinds of learning should be provided for a four- or five-year-old child who is beginning a school experience? First, he should have extended opportunity to explore the physical world. He should be helped to become increasingly sensitive to the world in which he lives. We want to provide full opportunity for doing and making. We want to support the developmental tendency in the child to deal with things indirectly, to symbolize them, to reproduce in his own particular way the experiences that have been meaningful for him. Finally, the child must be helped to a skillful and rich use of words and language forms. We must try to understand what really are the basic life deficits of most of the four- and five-year-old children of disadvantaged families and then, after that, think about what adaptations of usual school procedures, or relationships, should be made to meet the children where they are. Three different deficits can be associated with the family life patterns in negative conditions of poverty. First, these children do not have the language skills expected at their stage of development. At home, there may be a lack of close relationships. The third kind of deficit results from psychological uncertainty reinforced by the disorder of the physical environment. (Author/JM)

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Young Deprived Children and Their Educational Needs

by

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I.

Educational Needs of Young Deprived Children

PROJECT HEAD START IS PART OF AN EFFORT TO COMPENSATE, IF POSSIBLE, for the deprivation many children have suffered because of the circumstance of life into which they were born. We turn to schooling as a way of making up for this neglect and its deleterious effects because of a general assumption that what happens to children in the early years of life—how they feel about themselves, what ideas they get about people and the world in which they live—is basic and important for all the years to come.

Fortunately we have had experience with education for children from disadvantaged areas and know that, while they need special understanding and adjustments to their particular needs and characteristics, they are like all other children. Fundamentally, they have the same potentialities, the same curiosity, the same basic human problems to face in life—except that life has given them some extra ones no children should really have. When we talk about education, we want to begin by talking about what our understanding is of good education for young children—*all* young children.

Human beings are curious and, if the school lives up to its possibilities, they can remain curious. Children begin by being eager to know, to understand, to be able to do, to make an impact on the world in which they live. Another remarkable thing about childhood is that, in the first four or five years of life, the ways in which the child can know the world in which he lives go through a remarkable evolution. It begins when the only ways of knowing that an infant has available to him are by tasting, by putting in his mouth, by seeing. He *knows* his fingers because they have a taste, because he looks at them, because he twists them around. His whole world can be known to him only through the way in which his senses give him information.

But between infancy and age five or six a remarkable development process takes place. By the end of his kindergarten year, the child's ways of knowing about his world have reached an advanced and complicated stage. He has moved into the world of ideas and has considerable skill in dealing with

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them. What is summer? What kind of knowledge does the four-year-old have about summer? Maybe he has an image of a tree in a green meadow and a newborn calf, of a hot dog stand and the special smell no one ever smells in winter, of the sound of the waves splashing. Or, more than that, summer may already have a place in a time scale in his mind. If he knows that now it is spring, then he knows summer will come before Christmas. Like adults, though still a long way from his ultimate scope of thinking ability, he is already well able to deal with the world of things by intellectual long distance.

If his experience at home and in school has been of the kind that keeps this curiosity alive, he will, by the time he is through with kindergarten, have extended his curiosity into practically all realms of human experience. He is eager to know where things come from, what they are, what they are called. He cares about how things change. What has a cloud to do with snow? What has snow to do with ice? What has ice to do with a drink of water? He is beginning to understand. Are these one thing? In one sense they are. Or, are they different things? Or, he cares about people. How are people connected with each other? Who belongs to whom? What has a grandmother got to do with a mother, and then with a child? How do you get born? And always, of course, what is dying?

It is not inevitable that this remarkable transformation in the ways of knowing *will* take place for every growing child or that his curiosity will remain active and exciting to him and to the people who live with him. It depends upon the experience provided in these formative years.

What kinds of learning should be provided for the child during this period of development, when our goal is to help him gain knowledge of his world that is meaningful to him through ways best suited to his stage of development and to help him come to feel and understand how full of interest and zest living and learning can be? I would like here to deal with five kinds of experience that seem minimum essentials for a four- or five-year-old child who is beginning a school experience.

Exploring Physical World

First, he should have extended opportunity to explore the physical world. For this he needs open space and equipment, the kind that he can use with the coordinated use of his whole body: a jungle gym, balancing boards, saw horses, large wooden crates, slides, wagons, tricycles, carts—the things usually placed in outdoor play space. It is the way in which he spontaneously maneuvers with these objects that he learns to use his whole body as a controlled tool. This involves complex progressive coordination, important to the child's feeling of what he is and what he can do. It means there is learning (we could call it *studying*) to do. A child may suddenly wish to be sitting on top of the jungle gym, but that doesn't mean he can get there. It takes repeated efforts and trials—how to manage his arms, legs, head, body—be-

fore he really accomplishes that kind of monkey-like scurrying up to the top. And getting down is even harder. The child needs the opportunity to begin to use himself as a physical organism with control, skills and coordination and to know himself as a person who has these skills.

At the same time there is another kind of learning that goes on, one very important for his whole future development. He is learning what the nature of the physical world is. The things he heaves around have both size and weight, a d the size and the weight are impressions that are registered with him. The things he is pushing around have certain built-in relations as physical objects. He experiences pressure, leverage, balancing and hoisting. He is working with the principle of the wheel and the axle. Even though these are not the words or the ideas he uses, he is having that direct experience with the physical world which we consider a first fundamental step for concepts mastered later on.

In watching children at this kind of play, it is interesting to stop and think how many kinds of learning are really going on. A child may climb to the top of a big structure he has built out of packing cases, with a rope in his hand. Behind him he has left a pail; and maybe he has carefully placed three little pieces of wood and half a dozen stones in the bottom of the pail and tied the other end of the rope to the pail. When he gets to the top he is probably about twice his height from the ground; with a few careful tugs, hand over hand, the pail is hoisted up beside him. Then, probably, he thumps down and calls out some little call of triumph to his friends below.

Watching this we see lots of things. The child is having fun. The child is enjoying an activity he has carried through and planned from beginning to end by himself. The child is solving a problem, since the mechanics involved in hoisting are a problem to a little child. And the child enjoys a warm sense of accomplishment. It is this sense of accomplishment which we seek to provide for children in many different aspects of their learning experience, believing that each accomplishment, each skill, each mastery adds an ingredient of belief in self and pleasure in what one is able to do in one's environment.

Sensitivity to His Surroundings

Another kind of experience has to do with helping children to become increasingly sensitive to the world in which they live; to become keen observers of what there is around them; to have open eyes and ears to their surroundings. Partly this is done in the school where many and varied materials are provided for play and manipulation. These materials have many uses in children's play—the house corner to play "home," the blocks to build with, the paints on the easel, the storybooks on the table, the puzzle boards on the shelf. One of these uses is the variety of sense experiences they provide. The box of doll covers has something velvet in it, smooth and soft; something thin that almost blows away when you breathe on it; materials of

different colors and sizes; some that have been crocheted and have holes in them and others that you can't poke a finger through. The blocks are very hard, but the clay is not. You can't squeeze a block into a space it isn't fitted to go into, but if you push clay you can squeeze it any way you want it to go: it changes its shape according to how you squeeze it. The sand is rough and gritty. The soap suds often provided in these schoolrooms for play are soft and foamy.

And there is variety of perceptual discrimination: differences in size, in color, in shape. In the form boards the differences in shape are clearly accented, and it is these differences the children respond to when they try to work a form board. One finds musical instruments that have a whole range of sound. And sound varies not only in a musical instrument but in the way the teacher handles her management of the group. Often a teacher shifts from a fairly high, loud-pitched voice to a very soft tone; and, interestingly enough, it is the soft tone that brings the children to her. These are same ways to help children become more sensitive.

But things, of course, never do perform the magic. The magic ultimately comes through the teacher and all those involved in the children's education. It is adults who themselves see the importance of becoming good observers who can help sharpen the observations and discriminations of children. A teacher brings fish and a fish tank into the room to help the children understand that fish can't live unless they are fed or that they must not be overfed; but one hopes that there will be times when this teacher, for no immediate teaching purpose, stands with the child beside the fish tank, watching the fascinating movement of a fish swimming back and forth. Or, at another time, a teacher stands with the children outdoors and watches with them how long you can see the plane that's riding away into the clouds—the teacher who becomes an active guide, helping the children to see, to observe, and to discriminate in what they are seeing. In doing all this, the teacher is engaging the children in observation as a form of learning. Furthermore, the child who becomes keenly aware of what is happening around him is building up the feeling of being connected, of belonging in the world in which he lives. If any of us doubt the importance of keen, discriminating observation as a way of knowing and gaining important knowledge, we need only turn to the prescriptions of what makes a fundamentally good scientist.

Opportunity for Action Responses

A *third* kind of experience we want to provide for children is full opportunity for doing and making, for acquiring a large repertoire of what we might call *action responses*. Much of life in school for the very young child consists of this kind of experience. With blocks he builds—high, wide, low structures. Very often, before his buildings really represent anything in the real world, he is using blocks for the plain skill and pleasure of constructing and designing in

space. To be able to use crayons—not just for scribbling but to enclose spaces, make parallel lines or trail very neatly and exactly just within the edges of the paper—is a kind of skill the child develops and elaborates and enjoys. He is learning how to make objects follow his intention, and this is accomplishment even before he begins to be able to make a picture of a house, a girl or a tree. It is accomplishment to be able to enclose spaces, round or square ones, or circles that cross each other. It is accomplishment to be able to use a hammer and make the nail go straight into the wood. Certainly when you can make two pieces of wood stay together with the nail that you hammered in, there is a sense of mastery and skill. So is starting with an empty page, with great concentration, covering it all over with red paint.

In general, what is important is to give the child the opportunity to develop manipulative, constructive skills and, with these skills, to have the experience of changing the things in his world. It is important to note that this impact on the world and things is a nondestructive one. The child is satisfying a basic need to impress himself upon the world around him, doing it in a way that adds to the skills in his repertoire of responses; at the same time he acquires knowledge and understanding of himself as someone who can change his environment in a constructive and positive way.

Reproducing and Symbolizing Experience

The *fourth* kind of experience for learning takes us into a new psychological realm. Here we want to support the developmental tendency in the child to deal with things indirectly, to symbolize them, to reproduce in his own particular way the experiences that have been meaningful for him. This the child does over and over again in myriad ways. In his gesture he is reproducing actions he has seen; in his paintings, drawings, modeling with clay he is, in his childlike, primitive way, trying to bring back experiences he has had.

This progress into rehearsing, reproducing, symbolizing his experiences is the foundation of thinking. We provide him with multiple materials for this reliving of his experiences because we believe he thus strengthens his connection with his world, builds up a rich reservoir of meanings that become important to him in years ahead when he finds these meanings in the hieroglyphs on the printed page. Paint, clay, the music to which he moves symbolically and representatively are all vehicles for helping the child deepen and select meanings important to him in reliving his experience.

But, of course, in these years the most important way for the child to gain knowledge on this level is through play, the dramatic play in which he engages freely and fully, if the situation is favorable to him. It is a life of pretending, for which the school provides in many ways—materials, blocks, figures, toys, trains, dolls, dress-up clothes, housekeeping toys, and a hundred other things that are props for the child's pleasure in reworking feelings and ideas he experiences in real life. This becomes one of the most important ways in

which children extend their understanding of the world, rehearse what they realize. In their pretending they are free of reality, they can make things appear to be the way they really are not; they can express wishes; they can express feelings that could not be expressed legitimately in their real relationships in life. They set themselves problems, they solve problems. They take roles; they act like grownups, they act like babies; they get sick, get well, die and come to life again. They rehearse the knowledge they have gained about the real world. They are trainmen, engineers, pilots and firemen. The whole panorama of life is lived over again in the play of children. If there is any way of gaining knowledge particularly suitable to this stage of development, it is in the play which they spontaneously devise but which needs nevertheless an attentive and understanding teacher for its support and nourishment.

Language and Concepts

It is surprising that we should have come so far without mentioning language and concepts. In fact, the development of language and concepts is one of the most important aspects of growth in the early years. The use of words becomes the major tool for the child in dealing symbolically with his experiences, in being able to think in more complicated ways, to master the number system, to ready himself for being able to deal with the system of written language.

There are important stages during which a child organizes his understanding, his ideas, and the meaning of things and relations in the world in which he lives. Objects are not only objects to do things with, they also have names. They are not just ornaments in our universe, they have uses and functions. They not only have functions, they have shapes and colors and size. Objects are related to each other; certain things belong together. Objects and events may be classified and grouped in many ways. The child realizes that certain things, even people, can be both the same and different at the same time: a father is a husband. Not only are objects grouped and classified, but events have an order, a place in time. The arrangement of experience on a timeline begins to be understood during this period, and so does the important concept that things change from being one thing into another.

This is a brief and quick way of talking about the complex process of developing conceptual order in the world of things. Perhaps what is most important for us to realize on the educational front is that the child may be helped to gain mastery in the world of ideas and concepts in different ways. Part of his mastery depends upon being helped to a skillful and rich use of words and language forms, so that he can deal with ideas skillfully through the verbal system.

Another important idea educationally is that there are multiple, different ways of helping the child to bring conceptual order to his experience.

One is to use specific techniques that involve sorting, matching and organizing materials prepared exactly for this purpose. Another is to stimulate these intellectual processes in connection with children's activities as they are carried on. Here it is the teacher who is on the alert for moments when she can accent conceptual possibilities. A child hands her a painting. She doesn't just say, "That's nice, dear"; she says, "Well, today you made a red one." She is helping with naming of colors. She asks questions that are in comparative form: "Is John's building taller than Mary's?" Sometimes her way of accenting conceptual possibilities is by asking interesting questions which the children are not expected to answer but which she and they pursue later; e.g., by going on a trip in the neighborhood to see something or by finding a particular story to read. In this sphere of learning, almost more than any other, the teacher's role is to stimulate inquiry and to help the child find ways of pursuing his questions. The teacher, reading a story about a train that goes from the country to the city, pauses to help the children recognize how different the country train station is from the city one.

The organization of events in time is another meaningful way of conceptually organizing the experience, and this the teacher of young children is likely to do by bringing to the forefront the sequence of activities. The children may not be ready to use clock hours for times of day, but they are ready to recognize that first they go outside to play, then they have juice, and after juice they have a story. The first organization of events in time takes place through review of their own meaningful life experiences. So it is that the teacher has constantly in mind her function of helping the children clarify ideas and concepts, using her close relations to the meanings of their play and life experience as her lead for how to do this.

I have only touched upon the *role* of the teacher in providing these five major kinds of learning experience for children at this stage of development. There are, however, very well-developed and documented techniques for *carrying through* this role; for example, how to hold discussion periods, how to plan and conduct trips away from school for extending experience and stimulating observation and questioning, how to stimulate the play they themselves initiate. Beyond the matter of specific teaching technique, it is extremely helpful that the teacher of the young child understand (1) that the child is centered in himself; (2) that by connecting his new knowledge to meanings he has personally organized in his own life and by helping him bridge his own self-experience to his encounter with the outer world she can help him become an integrated child at this stage of development. It is also important for the teacher to bear in mind that much of the child's way of thinking is often a way of fantasy and make-believe, that one of the more important processes that is going on is his sorting out what is real and what is make-believe. Partly this is something he has to do by himself and for himself; partly it is an opportunity for the teacher to guide him toward what

is real in the world and what is not, without disparaging his playful fantasy productions.

Attention has been given here to how children learn and to the need for skillful and sensitive teaching at this stage of development. Attention should also be given to the fact that much depends upon the way in which the teacher can relate to the child, the extent to which the child can trust the teacher and feel that he is in a relation of mutual understanding with her. Partly this comes from the teacher supplying the supporting role, becoming very safe as a person to whom to bring one's troubles, doubts, shame or fears—a person who is not quick to correct when correction would stop the child in a first hesitant effort or make it hard for him to try again.

Much also depends on how the teacher can find ways of controlling children, since children do need to be controlled for their own sake. But these controls must be introduced in such a way that the children do not feel hurt or humiliated; they should appear sensible and reasonable even to these very little children. A great deal depends, too, on the extent to which the teacher can think along with these very young children, not expecting them to be as reasonable or as logical as older children will be; in effect, enjoying their transmutations of ideas and their creative mistakes, recognizing them as the playful and brave work of the young mind.

Out of all this experience we hope the child will begin to see himself and to feel himself as a person who is worthwhile in others' eyes; who is capable of doing things, of seeing things, of mastery; who can communicate with adults and with other children; and who can enjoy his own ability to initiate activities and play.

II.

The Impact of Deprivation on Young Children

ONE OF THE SERIOUS THINGS THAT MAY HAPPEN IN BRINGING THE FOUR- and five-year-old children of disadvantaged families into school is that we may create stereotypes of the disadvantaged child or the disadvantaged as a group of people. We are not dealing with a *type* of people or a *type* of child. Children, like the members of the families from which they come, react differently to poverty and deprivation, or cruelty and misery. For most of them, the serious life deficits of living under poverty leave serious scars, but there are many children who will impress us by the way in which they have come out of unfortunate life circumstance and still are developing as effective, articulate, skillful children. Perhaps the basic issue is that we shall remain aware of each child for the separate person that he is.

Our first task is to try to understand what really are the basic life deficits of most of these children and then, after that, to think about what adaptations of usual school procedures, or relationships, should be made to meet the children where they are. This kind of adaptation to the children is part of our general approach, in any case, to work with young children. The teacher of a young child perceives the child as a member of his family, coming from home into a strange school situation, needing and deserving to be understood as part of the life in which he has been growing up. It is possible to think of the life deficits of the disadvantaged child at different levels, some likely to be more seriously injurious to the child's whole development than others. Briefly, three different levels of deficit can be associated with the family life patterns in negative conditions of poverty.

Immature Language and Thinking

First, there is a pretty general observation that these children do not have the language skills expected at their stage of development; that it is not only the language that is immature but the thought processes expressed in language; that they have not really advanced to being able to know the things in their world. Sometimes they do not discriminate one thing from another. Often they do not know the names of things. Their information is limited and the usual expectation of an interested, curious, questioning, probing child is not fulfilled in the first days in which he comes into school.

Sometimes these deficits are explained by the fact that these children have had a restricted life experience, some never having been off the street on which they live: that they have not been in families where much conversation

goes on or where the use of language is developed; that the family pattern is not one that includes reading or newspapers or books as a built-in part of home life; that these children—many of them—have not had chances to play, have not had crayons and blocks or the kinds of things that middle-class families take for granted as part of their provision for their children. This restricted experience, both in terms of the use of language and in the hearing of language, accompanied by the lack of experience with the things and activities that other young children have at home, is the great hindrance in mastering language as a tool, since a child talks and thinks according to the model of talking and thinking he has before him in his home while young. The outcome of this deficit leads to difficulties in learning later on, learning to master the written language system, learning to read. The vicious spiral intensifies when the child feels himself a failure in school in the first, second or third grade and feels himself a relatively worthless human being. This is, of course, the great human waste that the antipoverty program is seeking to correct.

And even while we say all this, we have to correct ourselves and remember that there are some children who, in the clutter and the noise of city streets, have found wonderful ways of playing; have, in fact, exercised such imaginativeness in what can be done with a piece of wood or an old tire that one has to recognize that, for the children who can really overcome the barrenness and make something meaningful in their own independent play lives, there may be great power in their own resourcefulness to create and to overcome. We need to be aware that many of these children bring strengths as well as deficits into schoolrooms.

Lack of Close Relationships

There is another way—or maybe we could call it another level—of looking at the disadvantaged, of the life that's lived for most families and children under real poverty. Underneath the meagerness of language that the child experiences at home, there is perhaps a more serious barrenness. The people he lives with are not only not talking to each other, not using language freely in a richly developed way; it may well be that they are really not in close touch with each other as persons; that the child has not been noticed as the particular person that he is; that adults have not played with him very much; that he has not been involved in the kinds of connections with others from the very beginning of his life that help a child know who are the familiar people, who are the strange people. Perhaps his relations have always been only the very practical, functional relations—life at its minimal essentials with little left of energy or resources for making life a little richer, more varied, more enjoyable.

In thinking of the earliest development of children, one wonders whether these children have had the experience that we have been familiar with.

Before a baby can talk, in many families, there is a mother or a father or another adult who gurgles back to him his own nonsense syllables, who is there to respond to his earliest smiles or, later on when he becomes a toddler and shows signs of playing, recognizes his play before he can say anything about it. Much joint understanding and communication go on among people without the use of language and, when a child is very young, this way of feeling related to other persons, especially those who are important to him in his life, is a significant part of his development. Is there someone who says "choo-choo" when he pulls his box along the floor? Is there someone who hands him a piece of cloth to cover up the doll that he begins to play with?

These are only the simplest examples of a way of life between children and adults, and a way of life among the adults themselves, that becomes part of a child's basic learning and development. It is a matter of connecting with people; being sensed as a person by others; being involved in many rich, important and varied kinds of relationships with the human beings with whom a child lives; and of living in an atmosphere where the persons themselves are involved in such varied relationships. What the child misses here is not only a model of spoken language but, much more fundamentally, a lack of rich, meaningful communication beyond just the necessities of practical living. These lacks are deterrents for language use, indeed. Eventually they become deterrents for learning to read. But, more than that, more deeply, they are deterrents for being able to learn in general, because it is through the active relationship with people, it is through being known and felt and understood as a person that the child's basic curiosity and interest in the world begin to flower and develop.

Physical and Psychological Uncertainties

The third level of deficit is the most serious. Here we think of the children who live precariously on the edge of safety. This does not apply to many children, but those who come into a school group will be recognized as the children who will require understanding and skillful teaching.

These are the children who cannot be sure of the basic necessities. Will there be enough food? Is there someone to take care of you? There is uncertainty in their lives about whom they really belong to. Who is the father? And is the mother available to the child in important mothering ways? In fact, is there anybody who really cares about this child in a deep and important way?

The basic needs of the very young child to be sure that someone cares about him, wants him and will take care of him are not fulfilled for these children. In the disturbed family lives in which they find themselves, the world is one of unpredictable threats; the parents, living under extreme conditions of stress and disturbance, do not represent consistent figures for the child.

The child may be punished or deprived when there is no connection with something that he has done. He may simply be the innocent subject of the displaced panic of the parents. This means that the whole unpredictable world of the child carries a threat with it, and everyone who comes into his world is naturally suspect instead of trusted.

The psychological uncertainty of such a way of life is, of course, reinforced by the disorder of the physical environment, which is likely also to be characteristic of highly disturbed and deprived family situations. For children who come from these unusual but existing home situations one expects deeply anxious forms of behavior. Here the deterrent to development is not only poverty of language and thought and experience; it is not only that the child has been living in a minimal world of human relationships and has not been realized as an individual; it is more that he is living in such a threatening, uncertain, unordered life environment that we do not expect him to be able to take his place in school or make use of what it offers without a great amount of guidance, support and relearning in the kind of ordered situation that school represents. This kind of life deficit diminishes the development of personality at its very roots.

Adjusting Educational Practices

Just as there are different levels at which to understand the nature of developmental deficit for these children, so there are different ways of thinking about how we shall adjust our educational practices. Certainly we want to take recognition of the importance of bringing their language, ideas, understanding, and ways of gaining knowledge to higher and more developed levels than they have been able to accomplish thus far. Space here is too limited for listing the ways in which a good school, with all children, develops skills in language and thinking; but there is space for additional comments on what is especially important as we have learned it from teachers already working with these children. For example, one way of being sure that children become better talkers is to listen to them attentively and patiently, to try to understand them even when their words, accents and pronunciation may be distant from what we expect. We need to recognize that they need to learn, too, how to be listeners and that they cannot be expected without preparatory experience just to sit in an orderly group and listen to a teacher reading a story.

Preparatory experience can be varied. The teacher may have many pictures on bulletin boards which she takes down and talks about to the children or asks them to talk about. It may be that when she finally tries to read a story to the children, she keeps to a minimum the amount of reading and chooses books with large, colorful pictures so that the children can respond to the pictures and not sit for an inordinately long time listening to a detailed story.

Experienced teachers, through use of a variety of games, involve the child

not only in using words and learning the names of objects but direct him toward the discriminating and differentiating of his ideas that are basic to his thought processes. There are ways of developing songs in which the teacher mentions each child's name or some particular bit of each child's clothing and, in doing this, accomplishes two things: the child is made to feel that he is recognized as a person, as an individual, by the teacher; the ideas and the words included in this kind of play and group life become the tools for further thinking.

Some specific techniques developed by teachers for this kind of learning experience have to do with recognition of written symbols—the teacher uses symbols that stand for each child before he can recognize his name; or, when children have become accustomed to school life, she puts labels on the buildings they make.

Free, spontaneous play and activities are especially conducive to the development of language and communication among the children themselves. Basic to the development of language and thought is that the children shall themselves have rich and extended experience, for which there are well-developed techniques. For example, planning is important in taking children on a trip outside of school; the teacher needs to know how to prepare them, what to stimulate them to think about ahead of time, and how to encourage them to review and rehearse and play back the experience they have had.

Not only the widening of experience, but the teacher who herself becomes a model of interest in everything around, of questions to raise, of observations to make—all become the material from which a more developed language evolves. In the early stages, the teacher's sensitivity is a vital factor; she is the one who recognizes how receptive she must be in order to communicate to the child—without saying so—that she wants to understand and hear what he has to say.

There are many opportunities for developing better cognitive skills in the course of children's activities. The teacher who is interested in having the children develop some skill in the number system puts questions to them. How many boys are sitting around the circle today? How many girls are sitting around? Do you want three more blocks or do you want two more blocks? In addition to using the daily life of children for developing their language skills and ideas are other techniques definitely designed for this purpose. These may be useful to the teacher as long as she is mindful of the goal, which is that only the kind of experience that really supports the process of communication in these children is educationally important for them at this stage.

Emphasizing Order

To help these children in still another way make the best use of the opportunity for learning and development that we want them to have, it is

essential to remember that they are not accustomed to the kind of regulated, orderly life to which they have just been introduced. All children have a period of adjustment to make to the rules and regulations of life in a group situation, but these children come less ready, less prepared to take their places as individuals in a group situation. One of the most important things we can do for the children is to have things clear, well-organized. There should be no higgledy-piggledy piling up of things; the daily schedule should be clear and children helped to understand and accept that now we do this, then we do that, then we do something else. Adults involved need to be alert for the moment when things are likely to become disorderly, such as times when children are changing from one activity or going from one place to another.

In presenting new materials, things or activities, the teacher needs to be concrete, specific, simple, to demonstrate what she means rather than rely on verbal explanations. What she chooses for the children to do should be equal to what she thinks they can do rather easily, without frustration or likelihood of failure. For these children a negative experience can be a very inhibiting one. The goal is to build a world for them in the classroom that is a clear world, one in which they know where things are, what is going to happen next, and where they have a set of expectations that they can count on.

Teaching How To Play

Some teachers have been surprised to find that these children, far from taking to the toys and materials, seem rather indifferent to things—pick them up and drop them, do nothing with them, perhaps allow them to break. There are different ways of trying to understand why the children behave this way with all these attractive objects. Perhaps they are just not accustomed to having things. It is certainly clear that they do not see these things as tools for play, since to know how to play is something that has not yet been realized by many of them. But there is another reason. Perhaps their indifference to these playthings is due to the fact that these children are not accustomed to really caring for things. In fact, if one has not been previously and deeply cared for oneself, perhaps one does not have a caring attitude toward other people, other children or other objects.

One teacher, confronted with such a situation, reacted by doing two things. First, she was practical. She tried to buy indestructible objects; second, she tried to give some direct experience of caring. The teacher's aide was designated to sit at one end of the room and got the children to help her clean, mend, rebuild things that had suffered from destructive use. This serves as an illustration of how, in working with these children, we try to see in their behavior the results of what their experience in life has been and to provide them with new experiences to replace the negative aspects of their early childhood lives.

There is another way in which the teacher of these children may carry out her role differently than she would if she were working with children with other life experience. One of her goals is to initiate these children into free play activity. She realizes that they need active guidance, that they need almost literally to be taken by the hand to be led to begin using things. Here the teacher has to do quite a lot of "pump priming" to get the child to be aware of what he can do. It may be necessary to spend an unusual amount of time playing with him and talking with him about what he could use this or that little object for or how he could build a building; talking with him about the ideas that he has of where he's going to take the doll; stimulating him to play and leading him gradually to a more independent way of initiating ideas and thinking up play schemes that he can engage in with other children.

Relating to Teachers and Others

Basically, we cannot separate what these children will be able to learn—how much they can improve their language, how ready they can be for the next stages in school, how much they can begin to enjoy the healing and exciting experiences of play with things, toys and each other—from the relations that the teacher and the persons who help the teacher come to have to the children as persons. This distinction requires an understanding on the part of all the adults that the children will not necessarily be expected in the beginning to trust and love those who give them all these good things. In fact, they may treat adults with suspicion, may be distant from them. They may need to be encouraged to learn how to share pleasures, excitement and understanding. This will take place to the extent that teachers are sensitive, do not move in too fast for the children but build up around the life of the school such a way of living with the children that they have extended the safety zone; that the children realize and believe these are supporting, predictable grownups. They come to learn also that there will be controls, that this is not a place where they can run wild, upset and destroy. But this is a place where adults do not threaten or punish the child but rather are ready to give him new ways of learning how to handle his hostile feelings, his anxiety and his anger.

Much of the development of trust and understanding has to do with what happens within the child, how he comes to feel that he is a worthwhile human being. Of utmost importance is the child's awareness that he is known to the teacher and the other adults as an individual with distinct characteristics, that he will not be ostracized for his negative impulses. Further, trust deepens as he knows the adults around him understand impulses and will help him control them and keep them from having terrible effects on himself and other children.

Perhaps, as a conclusion, one instance will serve to illustrate some of these points about a teacher's relation to children: A consultant coming into a

schoolroom noticed that a bird in a cage had been placed upon a top shelf. The teacher explained that, since it was impossible to keep it down at the level of the children because all they wanted to do was to bang on the cage and keep the bird fluttering around, she decided the best way to cope with their excitement at the bird's disturbance was to put it up out of the way.

To the consultant, a bird in a cage on a high shelf was useless for a schoolroom. She gathered a small group of children around her, a few at a time—which is important to note, because in the beginning one cannot expect to communicate with a large group of children. She sat down with the bird cage in her lap, with four or five children around, and talked with them about the bird. "With what does the bird eat?" "How do *you* eat?" In this conversation they were thinking, figuring out. They eat with mouths; they have two lips. "A bird eats, too, but a bird eats with a beak and that's very different. That bird's beak is like someone's mouth." She went on with observations and comparisons. How little the bird is, how big by comparison the children are! They began to look at greater detail, about how the bird was made, about its feathers, how it sits, how it stands. And in such a process of communication the children were being guided by the teacher to see something in life they had never seen before, to see this in terms of themselves—a comparison between a bird and a child—and in so doing to establish a meaningful relationship with ideas, with language, with an adult. The bird came down off the shelf; both he and the consultant had become friends to the children.

It is in such teaching episodes that one sees exemplified the basic goals for educating all children and perhaps the special goal of bringing these children into more meaningful relationships with people at the same time that one extends and stimulates their understanding of the world around them.

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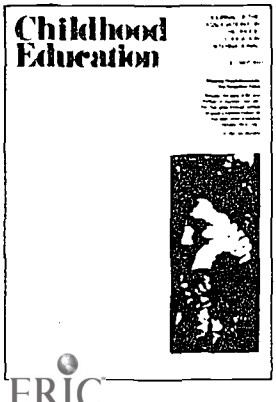

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