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ABSTRACT

Although tutoring can be very helpful to disadvantaged students, as can preschool experiences, neither of them is fundamental. The fundamental job consists of a basic change in the character of the school system itself from a middle-class situation to a more representative one, and intensive teacher training programs aimed toward building teacher respect for disadvantaged children and their families. Because the school system is failing these students, the tutor becomes very important. To help the student, the tutor must know something about the culture of the low-income person and the students' way of learning. Most of these students benefit tremendously if they can learn by seeing, touching, feeling, and doing. A teacher's style is also important, and these students seem to be most attracted to "informal authority." A tutor can greatly help the disadvantaged student by teaching him/her some of the "know-hows" of the school: how to take tests, how to listen, how to study. There are many types of teaching technology that may have special value for low-income students including the use of "hip" language in formal lessons. This can be done, for example, by presenting poems using the language or compiling dictionaries of "hip" words. Another aspect is the whole area of students helping each other. Our schools are certainly not perfect, and these disadvantaged students can contribute an enormous amount toward helping us change them. (PB)

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TUTORING THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD* EMP

Dr. Frank Riessman**

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FOR INSPECTION ONLY

INTRODUCTION

Before I discuss tutoring, I have a simple message to it that I would like to put before you:

I think you can do a tremendous amount in tutoring disadvantaged youngsters by way of opening up their interests, making a real connection with them, and helping them to make a meaningful connection to school. But I do not think tutoring is a fundamental approach to the education of the disadvantaged child. Two myths have appeared on the American scene; two approaches seem to be developing for the education of the disadvantaged: the pre-school and the remedial. I am entirely in favor of pre-school education and remedial education, but I do not think that either of them is fundamental, and we get lost if we make them the central issues.

The combination of these two approaches seems to imply the following: "Children from low income homes have a terrible background and they cannot easily get along in the schools. Let us get them very early and prepare them so that we do not have to change the schools very much. We can keep the schools as they are and prepare the youngsters at an early age so they can be attuned to the school and its culture. If we fail, let us remedy the situation with remedial techniques at a later point."

I submit this is the wrong basic lines because the fundamental job has to be done in the school itself, not in extra-school experiences and not in pre-school experiences.

* Presented at the Tutor Orientation Symposium, October 17, 1964, under the auspices of the Office of Tutoring Services and Georgetown University.

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Change Needed in the Schools

At the center of what needs to be done, it seems to me, are the following:

1. A basic change needs to be made in the character of the school system itself, by bringing into the school the indigenous low income non-professionals as teacher aides, as assistants in the classroom, etc. These people would also help in changing the whole character of the system from a top heavy middle class kind of situation to a more representative one.
2. There is a need for an intensive teacher training program aimed toward building teacher respect for disadvantaged children and their families. An example of a highly successful program of effective teaching of the disadvantaged is Samuel Sheppard's in the Ban-neker School District in St. Louis. His teachers have not only been much more contented themselves, and have not dropped out of the "slum" schools. There are waiting lists of teachers who want to come into Dr. Sheppard's school system!

The Tutor's Role

Having said this, I shall now try to put tutoring in its proper context. As the present time the school system has failed the disadvantaged child because it has not understood this child: his type, his culture, his strengths. The school has emphasized his deprivations, his weaknesses, his limits. And in placing the emphasis on his deficits it has emphasized the wrong deficits. I don't think it is linguistic ability, or any of the cognitive defects that are usually assumed.

In the context of the assumption that the school system is failing these youngsters, the tutor becomes enormously important.

I am reminded here of the study conducted at the Bank Street College of Education. Fifty people, school personnel, were brought together from all over the country to work with highly disad-

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vantaged emotionally disturbed children, as measured by a series of criteria. The main criterion was that the children were in the "600" schools for disturbed children in New York City. These youngsters were doing very poorly in schools, were low achievers, and were having lots of trouble. What happened to these youngsters during the one month project? For one hour in the morning, one teacher worked with one child in a tutoring context. The child felt tremendously rewarded by having his own teacher, having one person concerned with him, with whom he could really "level" and possibly identify to some extent. (I am not suggesting this happened in each case.)

Apparently a great deal of improvement occurred not only in the academic work of these youngsters but in their behavior problems as well in the following year. Most of the follow-up analysis of the project seems to indicate that the most important thing that happened in the experiment was the one hour one-to-one situation.

What the Tutor Needs to Know

It is extremely important for the tutor to aim high -- aim for a real connection to the child or youngster. A strong effort should be made to find things that catch his interest, and relate his interests to the school world which is quite alien to him.

In order to help the youngster there are two general areas that the tutor has to know something about: One is the culture of the low income person and the other is the cognitive style, or way of learning, of these youngsters.

Low Income Culture: People working with these youngsters, whether they be tutors, teachers, or guidance counselors, need to become interested in low income culture, not only through reading anthropological material but through artistic materials -- reading novels, seeing movies, making comparisons with other low income

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cultures. Discussions around books like Warrne Miller's The Cool World and the movie made from it may be more helpful and stimulating than any anthropological text. Contrasts can be brought out and issues stimulated by books and movies about the disadvantaged in other nations. Thus the British film "The Sporting Life", and "Saturday Night, Sunday Morning" may be useful. Such films and novels offer tutors a different perspective and a closer "inside" feeling for disadvantaged cultures.

The purpose is to get involved and interested in the meaning of culture. Let us take an example. It is widely contended that a Negro, female based, low income families, where there is no consistent father in the home, boys grow up lacking in masculinity. It is further argued that these youngsters, lacking a male figure to identify with, need men in the school to compensate for this lack. I think they need men teachers but for a different reason.

Let me explain what I mean: I was puzzled by this problem for many years. My everyday observations about the Negro family were nothing like what I had been told to expect of this family. I observed children at two and three years of age in the neighborhood where I lived in New York City: They were tough, strong, masculine kids. They did not seem to have suffered from not having a consistent father in the home. They stood up for themselves, they fought back, and so on. Some people contend that when this occurs in their peer groups at 15 or 17 years of age, this is compensatory. But -- you don't compensate at two!

I will give you my alternative explanation of the situation where the mother brings up the child and the child is nevertheless very masculine. I think the mother teaches her sons in a remarkable effective way how to be men -- how to tough. And she teaches them in two ways: by providing a model for imitation, since she is a very tough person, and by telling them "stand up for yourself, hit back when someone hits you (just don't hit

me, because I'm tougher than you are.)" I think this is why these highly masculine kids don't like a prissy, highly feminine school system. It is not because they didn't have fathers in the home, but because they happened to have a fairly masculine upbringing which they would like to have continued in the school. I think this is part of what is involved, although I know this is contrary to what you are usually told about the matter. All I'm asking is that you become interested in this issue; I'm not asking you to believe it.

What I am really concerned with is that you become interested in the puzzle of this behavior. Why, for example, do Puerto Ricans have safety dreams about their children? Is this over-protective? What is the meaning of the broken family in the low income situation? Does it really mean the children are not taken care of or does the family regroup around the mother, and the matriarchial figures such as the grandmother, and form an entirely different kind of life? What is the meaning of the extended family structure? These are the kinds of questions I think you should be interested in. This interest in his culture will allow you to connect with the disadvantaged child, and you will find it easier to select novels, plays, music that might interest him. Finding material that will interest him and discussing this with him is much more important than any formal exercises which you can go through with the child.

Understanding the Learning Style: Keep in mind that the style I will present to you very briefly is not existent in every child you are going to be working with. It is a rather general model. I suggest that the most central feature in it is the physical way of learning. These children like most to learn things through touching them, through doing something with them, through acting upon them and through seeing them. Taking trips with the youngster and actually participating in some action with him that is not verbal alone, is crucial. It is the key not only to the understanding of his style, but to the way of

developing verbalization in him.

If you set up learning situations around things he can see, do, touch, and feel, you will make a much greater connection with him.

These youngsters very often have a slow style, which is connected with this physical style. If you had to do things with everything you talked about, you might be slower in talk-about them. There are other reasons for slowness, including insecurity, lack of knowledge, ignorance, lack of know-how. Part of your job as a tutor is to appraise, in your interaction with the youngster, something ^a about the nature of his style. Why is he slow? Is this a temporary thing which he will get over as he gets over his anxiety? Or is it something that is a reflection of a basic physical style and temperament which may be one important way of learning? We have come to believe that learning through reading and writing and hearing and speaking is the only way of learning. I am suggesting that this is one style and a perfectly fine one. I am not depreciating it. I think, however, that there are other styles and other combinations of styles and that disadvantaged youngsters are more often likely to have styles which have the physical quality. Many middle class people have dimensions of this style as well, and some even have it in a strong form, but it is more characteristic of low income youngsters.

The Tutor's Style: Related to this entire discussion about the culture and learning style of the low income youngster is the matter of the teacher, or tutor's style, and his approach to these youngsters. I think that what they would like most in a teacher can be summarized in two words: informal authority. Informality and authority are not seen as contradictions: and the poor like both. They like teachers who are strict, definite, know what they are doing, ordered and organized, but on the other hand they like directness, simplicity and warmth.

To the extent that you can function in this way it will be responded to very positively by the youngsters. However we all have individual styles, and if some things I mention do not fit you, do not try to assume them. If you are not really getting somewhere with a particular child in terms of his style and yours, I suggest that you not work with him for a long period of time, that you switch and work with another child who may be more responsive to your particular style.

What You Can Do

I suggest that you make a great effort to develop the know-how of the youngster. Make the assumption that he knows nothing about how the school works. A few of the "know-hows" are: how to take tests, how to listen, how to work in groups, how to make an outline, how to study.

These deficiencies are much more changeable than the cognitive factors. I worked with a youngster not long ago in high school. She came to the tutoring session and told me that she had done well on a test she had taken. "How well?" I asked. "About an 80". Next week, we went over this paper on which she actually received a grade of 40%. "That's a pretty bad estimate" I said. "You really don't know what's going on. You're getting 40's and you think you're going to get an 80. Let's look at the paper." Originally she told me that she had answered all 50 short answer questions and gotten 40 right out of 50. But, she failed to answer three other questions which happened to be essay questions. She didn't realize that the essay questions counted the other 50%. She didn't know how the test was divided up or that in general, essay questions count more than short answer questions. She knew nothing about how to answer questions that were essay. She did not know that you could bull, for example. Or that you could write part of the answer and outline it and show some general knowledge and that you could get some credit for this! She thought you either knew it or you didn't know it.

She didn't know how to get out of herself her own knowledge. She didn't know, for example, how to take some information that she knew and free associate to it and deduce from it and thus extend her answer to the question. (Incidentally, it is not true that everyone who does this knows that he is doing it, but these are two of the techniques by which you expand your own knowledge.)

These youngsters don't know how to listen to teachers. (I take notes as a form of gearing my attention to listening, otherwise my mind will wander. I force myself to listen by taking notes even though I may never look at the notes again.) People have to learn their own particular style of listening and attending. These youngsters have learned nothing about this. I think they are abysmal failures in this area. I think they are terribly bright, verbal, spontaneous, but they have no ability at all in terms of this kind of know-how.

The tutor can make a tremendous contribution by teaching them about the school rules, how to listen, how to make tests, how to make outlines.

Another contribution that the tutor can make is to help them to develop their interests and style. In order to do this you have to do something with the youngster that he feels like doing - go to a baseball game, a football game, the aquarium, the zoo, a science exhibit, an auto race. This will help you to find materials that can be used for teaching purposes. You don't just say "did you go to that movie last night? Let's discuss it." It won't do. You've got to go to the movie with him and find out how perceptive he is in areas that interest him.

Appropriate Teaching Technology

Let me list a number of approaches that may have special

value for low income children:

1. The "organics" approach of Sylvia Ashton Warner. Her book The Teacher should be especially valuable in utilizing the interests and strengths of these youngsters, and should guard against their being "acted upon". She wrote an earlier book called Spinster which is also valuable.

2. The Montessori System, which envisions a 35 to 1 ratio of children to teacher. The stress on sensory materials and on order in this approach should be particularly congenial to low income youngsters.

3. Role-play. This is a very simple technique and you don't have to become any great expert to do this in an academic context. You can act out history lessons, act out literature lessons, act out words.

4. All kinds of games: "In the Manner of the Adverb," Robbins' "Auditory Set" Game.

5. Scope, the new magazine published by Scholastic Magazine is particularly attuned for teaching the disadvantaged.

6. The journal Negro Heritage. Address: P.O. Box 8153, Chicago, Illinois.

7. The use of "hip" language. I am not suggesting that in our every day informal talk we use "hip" talk. I am suggesting that "hip" language, the language of the street, can be used in a formal lesson to advantage. I'll give you some examples of this:

This is a poem by Langston Hughes, which was used in a Syracuse, N.Y. teaching program for disadvantaged youngsters:

I play it cool and dig all jive,
That's the reason I stay alive.
My motto, as I live and learn,
Is: Dig and be Dug in Return.

This fine poem by Negro author Langston Hughes opened a new world of learning to a class of ninth graders at Madison Junior High.

The poem was presented to the class by Gerald Weinstein, curriculum coordinator of the Madison Area Project.

A teacher had complained to Weinstein that her students "practically fell asleep" when she read a poem called "Magic Carpet" from a standard school anthology. (We've all fallen asleep to that poem.)

Weinstein came to the rescue with Hughes "Motto" and distributed copies to the class. This is his account of what happened:

-After the students read the poem, there was a long moment of silence, then came the exclamations:

"Hey, this is tough."

"Hey, Mr. Weinstein, this cat is pretty cool."

"Hey, it's written in our talk."

But when asked the meaning of "Playing it cool", the students had difficulty in verbalizing the idea. And you might have come to the inaccurate conclusion that they are inarticulate and non-verbal and all the rest of the stereotypes. Weinstein was much cleverer than that. He decided to have a role playing situation acting out playing it cool. They decided that Weinstein take the part of a teacher and they assigned some boy to play it cool.

Weinstein was the teacher and the boy pretended he was walking down the hallway.

"Hey you," said the teacher, "you're on the wrong side of the hall. Get over where you belong."

Without looking up, the boy very calmly and slowly walked to the other side and continued without any indication of what was going on in his mind.

That was "playing it cool."

When Weinstein asked a boy to show what he would do when not playing it cool, a verbal battle ensued. Now they woke up and were able to verbalize about this. Their grammar is better

than you think it is, when they get involved and are willing to verbalize around something they have seen and participated in.

The class began offering definitions for "playing it cool": calm and collected, no strain. Weinstein suggested another, "non-chalant." A new word.

Next came the discussion of the phrase "dig all jive."

One student told how he once got into trouble because he didn't "dig the jive" of a group of streetcorner toughs.

So the message of Hughes' poem, the class discovered, was that he "stayed alive" because he "dug all jive" -- understood all kinds of talk.

Hughes' motto was to "dig and be dug in return" -- understand and be understood.

Recently in tutoring a disadvantaged high school student in English, I employed a hictionary in completely systematic and formal fashion. The first and rather immediate result was that the student learned a great many new English word definitions for the "hip" words with which she was long familiar:

<u>Hip Word*</u>	<u>Definition</u>
"bug"	to disturb, bother, annoy
"cop out"	to avoid conflict by running away, not considered admirable or honorably accepted
"cool it"	to be quiet, peaceful, tranquil
"far out"	not comprehensible
"weak"	inadequate, inappropriate

Words such as "tranquil", "inappropriate," etc., were not known by this youngster, but though use of the hip "word game"

* The words in this list were taken from a hictionary entitled "The Other Language" developed by Anthony Romero at Mobilization for Youth, January, 1962. Another is by Elliot Horne and entitled, Hictionary.

she quickly became familiar with them and derived great pleasure from a new found use of various "big" words.

Another dimension to consider is the whole concept of the youngsters teaching others. We have lots of direct evidence now that people in helping others very often are much more helped themselves.

In Albany, New York, a woman by the name of Schneider, asked youngsters who had difficulty in reading to read terribly simple material to very small children. In fact, she used role-playing by asking them to anticipate reading to small children and read to her. She found that in doing this their reading improved tremendously. Incidentally, I think this has a great deal of meaning for the entire integration movement. You hear a great deal of talk about what is going to happen when the white middle-class more advanced youngsters get together with the Negro youngsters coming from the segregated schools, who are behind in learning. You also hear that this is one of the great sacrifices that the white children are going to put up with as they help the Negro children and hold themselves back while the Negro children catch up. This view overlooks one great possibility that we haven't really utilized: the giver of this help, in this case, the more advanced child, may learn a great deal from the experience of teaching. It is a form of learning that is particularly useful for certain children. This principle can be used very profitably in all situations in which you group children of different levels.

I have one final closing comment to make that may provide some backdrop for all that has been said. If you look at the field of education in the United States today, you see constant criticism of the school system, the curriculum, the teachers, the administration. The conformity of the system, the lack of real learning, etc., are constantly attacked. Paul Goodman, Edward Friedenberg, and many others have plenty of criticisms of schools and teachers. In a similar vein, there is constant

powerful criticism of the middle-class in our country. I call this the Erich Fromm motif. It has been more recently taken over by Paul Goodman. This is the penetrating, deep, critical evaluation of our society, and of middle-class people in particular, as conformists who have lost their spontaneity, their inner convictions. This criticism is very widespread. But there is one place where it barely arises, and this is when the teaching of disadvantaged children is discussed. The disadvantaged children apparently are to be made into these middle-class people by the school culture; they are to be made to adapt to the oft-criticized school. Suddenly when we talk about these youngsters, we have much more idealized pictures of the school and the middle-class life these youngsters are to be prepared for. Suddenly these children are to be made to adjust, to conform to our wonderful ways, forgetting how critical we have been. I agree with the David Riesmans, Paul Goodmans, and Erich Fromms and many of school critics that a great deal has to be done in changing the middle-class and the school. Very seriously, I feel that these disadvantaged youngsters, with their culture and their style and their positives, can contribute an enormous amount toward helping us change the middle class, and school system and the society.*

*See John Oliver Killens, "Explanation of the 'Black Psyche'" New York Times magazine section 6, June 7, 1964, p. 37 for an excellent discussion of the Negro contributions to "our age".