Factors which limit the disadvantaged child in academic achievement as measured by standardized tests

Theresa Coyle
FACTORS WHICH LIMIT THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AS MEASURED BY STANDARDIZED TESTS

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Sister Theresa Coyle S.L.

A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION (READING SPECIALIST) AT CARDINAL STRITCH COLLEGE

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1973
This research paper has been
approved for the Graduate Committee
of Cardinal Stritch College by

Sister Marie Colette
Advisor

March 1973
Date
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to extend gratitude to the many whose encouragement made this work possible.

Sincere gratitude is expressed to the Sisters of Loretto and friends who supported and encouraged the writer in her pursuit of further studies. Special thanks to Reverend John E. Bokel, Associate Superintendent of Schools in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, for freeing the writer from Clinic teaching during summers so that attendance at Cardinal Stritch was possible.

Gratitude also goes to Benjamin E. Williams, Principal of Visitation Holy Ghost School, St. Louis, who encouraged and permitted the writer to use the test results shown in this paper. It was the children of Visitation Holy Ghost School, whose richness of race and culture motivated the writer to search for the information included in this paper.

Lastly, deep appreciation is expressed to Sister Marie Colette, O.S.F. whose wise direction and patience enabled this writer to bring this paper to a successful completion.
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Since the Right to Read effort was launched in 1969, there has been an upsurge of interest and concern by educators and society in general regarding this important issue. That every normal child must learn to read has brought to the foreground many questions which previously were not raised. Although millions of dollars and man hours have been spent in seeking solutions to these questions, the reason why some children do not learn to read still remains a mystery.

The Right to Read effort has focused special attention on the so-called "disadvantaged" child. The ultimate reading goal for this child is no different from that of other boys and girls. However, the short-term and day-by-day reading goals for the disadvantaged child will have to be somewhat different if the ultimate goal is achieved by the time he leaves school. This is true particularly in terms of approaches and methodology.¹

Figure 1 quotes sociologists as saying that by 1975 two out of three children in school will be classified as disadvantaged. Test scores for the disadvantaged children in large cities indicate that "progressive retardation" is taking place. The longer a child remains in school the less progress he makes in relation to his capacity for learning to read.\(^1\) Deutsch has coined the term "cumulative deficit" to describe this progressive retardation.\(^2\)

The continued use of standardized tests as instruments of appraisal in determining whether or not the goals of the Right to Read are being achieved raises doubts as well as questions. Because of cultural differences among the disadvantaged it becomes an almost hopeless task to measure achievement and potential with presently available tests.\(^3\)

**Statement of the Problem**

The writer's purpose in this paper was to investigate the literature concerning contributing factors which limit the disadvantaged child in academic achievement as measured by standardized tests.

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 2


The writer felt the urgency to make such an investigation as a result of seeing the comparison of scores obtained on a group IQ test versus those on an individual IQ test. The individual IQ test yielded substantial differences which appears to indicate that potential often exceeds performance depending on circumstances. Table 1 includes the data obtained from two groups of Negro children tested over a two-year period.

**TABLE 1**

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE KUHLMANN ANDERSON IQ SCORES AND THE SCORES OF THE WECHSLER INTELLIGENCE SCALE FOR CHILDREN (WISC) OF TWO GROUPS OF NEGRO CHILDREN OVER A TWO YEAR PERIOD*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Kuhlmann Anderson Score</th>
<th>WISC Score</th>
<th>Difference</th>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. B.</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>+14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. D.</td>
<td>71</td>
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<td>L. F.</td>
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<td>87</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. J.</td>
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<td>118</td>
<td>- 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. J.</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>- 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. M.</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>+ 7</td>
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<td>R. O.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>93</td>
<td>+ 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. S.</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>+23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. T.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>+21</td>
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TABLE 1—Continued

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<th>Kuhlmann Score</th>
<th>WISC Score</th>
<th>Difference</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>92</td>
<td>+20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. W.</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. C.</td>
<td>79</td>
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<td>E. L.</td>
<td>81</td>
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<td>+31</td>
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<tr>
<td>F. F.</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>107</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. F.</td>
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<td>+9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. W.</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>+25</td>
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</table>

*These children represent two groups from a non-graded school population. Chronological ages ranges from 8 years to 11 years.

Scope and Limitations

Although the investigation of literature in this paper was directed to the disadvantaged child, the writer
was specifically interested in the Negro child who attends the Inner City School. Therefore, more emphasis was placed on the literature which would help the writer understand the contributing factors which limit the "disadvantaged" Negro child in academic performance as measured by standardized tests.

The writer hopes that the opinions, both positive and negative, stated in this paper will be recognized as opinions only. However, the opinions are those of authorities in the field of education, psychology, sociology and medicine. As such they have motivated the writer to continue questioning, evaluating and searching for an understanding of these opinions in order to respond to the needs of a child in whatever way he may be "disadvantaged."

The review of the literature was limited to that published during the last five years except in a few instances where the valuable foresight of certain authorities made contributions which are as current as present-day research and studies.

Definitions of Terms

Recent literature offers a variety of definitions to describe the "disadvantaged." For the sake of brevity and clarity this writer uses the following:

According to Havighurst

Disadvantaged pupils should be distinguished from mentally handicapped and physically handicapped pupils. They are those who have been denied certain basic social experiences, in particular certain experiences in
the family that the majority of children have had.¹

Horn describes the disadvantaged as..."any person, who for any reason or reasons, is unable to realize his potential fully or to enter the mainstream of life in his community."²

Many of the children referred to as "disadvantaged" live in the Inner City. Gorden and Wilkerson define inner city as

...the heart or center of the city where housing is expensive and inadequate...there is high mobility. People who live here are hungry, on relief, and often represent broken homes. Crime, violence, sex, drug abuse and alcoholism flourish.

The disadvantaged are often referred to as being "culturally deprived." Culture is defined by Johnson as

...a way of life, a design for living that consists of attitudes, beliefs, practices, patterns of behavior, and institutions that a group has developed in response to particular conditions in order to survive."³

In reviewing the literature certain terms describing


linguistic ability occur frequently and are defined according to various authors in the following manner:

Standard American English: A socially unmarked variety of spoken American English used as a reference point in school language instructions to increase the individual's repertoire of important and useful ways of communicating. This variety of American English is often heard on network radio and television newscasts.¹

Dialect: A variety of a language, generally mutually intelligible with other varieties of that language, but set off from them by a unique complex of features of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.²

Nonstandard Dialect: The collective patterns of a subcultural group that does not have the prestige of the collective speech patterns (standard English) of the dominant cultural group (the middle-class).³

Bi-dialectalism: A term describing the ability to use two dialects of the same language effectively.⁴

The major portion of this paper deals with contributing factors which limit the disadvantaged child in academic achievement as measured by standardized tests. Scales has defined standardized tests as:

...a systematic sample of performance obtained under

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²Raven McDavid, Jr., "Dialectology and the Teaching of Reading," The Reading Teacher, XVIII (December, 1964), p. 207.

³Dorothy S. Strickland, "Black is Beautiful vs. White is Right," Elementary English, XLIX (February, 1972), p. 221, citing Kenneth R. Johnson, "The Language Barrier--A Crisis in Education of Black Children," (School of Education, University of Ill. at Chicago, 1968). (Mimeographed)

prescribed conditions, scored according to definite rules, and capable of evaluation or interpretation by reference to normal information. Hence, every standardized test undergoes a tryout or an evaluation by being given to a typical cross-section of the population or of a particular group. The quality of the final product depends in no small part on the care with which this step is carried out. The interpretation of the test performance obtained is usually based on comparison with the performance of some standard reference group. If obtained judgments are to have any real merit, the standard reference group or normative group is of paramount importance.

Summary

This chapter called attention to the goals of the Right to Read effort in regard to the disadvantaged child. In the statement of the problem, the writer's intention was to review the literature for factors which limit the disadvantaged child in academic achievement as measured by standardized tests. Definitions by authorities in the field were cited in order to clarify terminology discussed in this paper.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Before attempting to discuss the factors which limit the disadvantaged child in academic achievement as measured by standardized tests, it is important to examine the purpose for which standardized tests are used.

Purpose of Standardized Tests

According to Cohen, standardized tests are tools, not ends in themselves and should not be used in the school curriculum unless their primary goal contributes to promoting learning. The first priority of a test, then, is to teach. Tests should sample behavior or information that is important for a child to remember. In order to answer test questions, the student must think about what he has been taught and then apply as much appropriate information as he can.¹

As tools, tests yield diagnostic information the teacher can use to tailor course content for the need of the student. Test results may also aid in identifying stu-

dents who are not working at their greatest potential.¹

For diagnostic purposes, pretests and post-tests should be administered to children. Pretesting establishes what behavior and information a child needs to learn; for the teacher, the pretests further indicate the level and rate at which he should learn. Pretesting, then, is the major determinant in each child's curriculum. Post-testing after instruction allows both the child and the teacher to observe the quantity and quality of his learning.²

Tests are further used to evaluate teacher and pupil performance and to measure the effectiveness of materials and methods. Evaluation through testing should have a positive effect and therefore result in progress.³

Factors Which Limit the Disadvantaged Child in Academic Achievement as Measured by Standardized Tests

Educators have long been aware of the use of tests as a means of defining and evaluating problems. Likewise, they have been aware of many factors which limit children, especially the disadvantaged, in test performance and educational achievement.

The so-called crisis in urban education appears to have materialized in the last few years, contemporar-

²Cohen, Teach Them All to Read, p. 57.
neously with our concern over civil rights and poverty. In effect, the crisis is in the center of our urban areas, in the ghettos populated by the poor and the minority groups. But the fact that children of minority groups and/or low-income families do not do as well in school as middle-class Caucasian children is not a new problem nor a sudden discovery.¹

**Limiting factors in socio-economic background.**—Research shows a strong correlation between a student's education achievement and his socio-economic background. "Reading test performance and socio-economic status have been shown to be highly related at all levels." Statistics in California show that the child from a disadvantaged background falls behind at the rate of three months for every year he is in school. Thus, at the end of the third grade, he is already a full year behind the middle-class student. By the time he enters his teenage years he is two years or more behind and about to become a dropout.²

**Limiting circumstances of membership in minority groups.**—Johnson states that..."minority group membership is not synonymous with being disadvantaged. However, a person's chance of being disadvantaged are increased if he is black instead of white." His chances for economic and cul-

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tural advantages have been limited because of discrimination. The incomes of black families of every level of education are significantly lower than the income of white families.¹

Consequently, black families have been forced to live in poor, run-down or negative neighborhoods where they learn to survive with minimum food, clothing, furniture, heat and the like. The environment in which these children live restricts the kinds of experiences that support the instructional efforts of the school. Books in the home, educational toys and trips to cultural facilities—all objects and services that satisfy educational needs outside school for the middle-class child—are experiences the disadvantaged black child cannot afford.²

Limitations of environment.—Although the environment of the disadvantaged child may be negative because it restricts his experiences, the concepts and experiences gained from it are different, not necessarily deficient. Contrary to the belief of some educators, his environment is overstimulating. Children who live in a noisy environment, under crowded conditions and surrounded by activity are bombarded with stimuli. In order to have peace of mind, they learn to shut out excessive stimuli. Consequent-

²Ibid., p. 30
ly, this habit is carried over into the school where the child shuts out the instructional stimuli provided by the teacher.¹

Depressed areas are often characterized by homes broken by divorce, desertion and death. Because of unemployment or employment which does not provide sufficient income for the family, many fathers leave home voluntarily or are forced to do so in order for their families to receive financial aid from welfare. The father's absence leaves the home lacking a male image. The mother is often overburdened with the care of the family. She has limited time for the individual child. All too frequently the child has little or no conversation with the mother or other adults. There is lack of encouragement at home to achieve.²

The positive side of the underprivileged family should not be ignored. Many children belong to the "extended family."

There are many parents or parent substitutes. The home typically includes aunt's, uncles and grandparents, all of whom may, to some degree, play a parental role.³

"The father's absence does not necessarily mean that a disadvantaged black child is not able to achieve in school."

¹Ibid., p. 31.
The extended family supplies basic needs of love and security. When these children fail in school, it is due to other factors.¹

The inclusion of health as a contributing factor to success or failure of a child in school cannot be minimized.

The child who is apathetic because of malnutrition, whose sequence of prior experiences may have been modified by acute or chronic illness, whose selectivity as a perceiver and whose organizing ability as a learner may have been affected by previous exposure to risks of damage to the central nervous system, cannot be expected to respond to opportunities for learning in the same way as does a child who has not been exposed to such conditions; for the effective environment of any organism is never merely the objective situation in which he finds himself, but is rather the product of an interaction between his unique organismic characteristics and whatever opportunities for experience his objective surroundings may provide. Thus there is no reason to think that we can fully compensate the child handicapped by an existing biologic disadvantage merely by increasing his objective opportunities for learning in school settings.²

Horn says that health defects are found more frequently in socially disadvantaged children than in a typical group of American children.³ Illness keeps the child home from school and causes him to miss important phases of instruction. It

¹Johnson, "Social Background: Blacks," p. 13


³Horn, Reading for the Disadvantaged, p. 18.
is obvious that the school progress of such children then will be slow and retardation the usual outcome.\textsuperscript{1}

It is clear that a society genuinely concerned with educating socially disadvantaged children must concern itself "with the full range of factors contributing to educational failure, among which the health of the child is a variable of potential primary importance."\textsuperscript{2}

To believe that all socially deprived children from similar environment, racial and social conditions have the same educational problems would be a false assumption. Many of these children are superior in intellectual ability and if given proper stimulation can be educated to become leaders. "The children of the poor do learn effectively when guided in appropriate learning experience."\textsuperscript{3}

Cultural differences.— Riessman calls attention to the positive features in the various cultures of disadvantaged groups. Their cognitive styles, mental style or way of thinking is different but not necessarily deficient. Although most disadvantaged children are relatively slow in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Emerald Dechant, Diagnosis and Remediation of Reading Disability (West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1968), p. 76.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Birch and Gussow, Disadvantaged Children: Health, Nutrition and School Failure, p. 9.
\end{itemize}
performing intellectual tasks, this slowness is an important feature of their mental style and needs to be carefully evaluated. Since American culture places so much emphasis on speed, a fast child is often classified as "smart" and is rewarded while the slow child is classified as "dull."¹

Hence, the disadvantaged child who is slow in performing often gives the appearance of being a poor student. His slowness is mistaken or misunderstood by the teacher and because of the demands placed upon him in the school system, "the slow learner then may become the poor learner."²

Metfessel and Seng summarized the low achiever's learning style by the following characteristics.

Low achievers characteristically demonstrate a cognitive learning style that responds more to visual and kinesthetic signals than to oral or written stimuli. They have a poor attention span when presented with too many stimuli at one time. Thus, they tend to perseverze longer in a task involving one activity. They learn more readily by inductive than by deductive approaches. They also learn less from what they hear than their middle-class counterparts. They are typically at a marked disadvantage when placed in a timed-learning and test situations


perhaps because of their lack of self-confidence and negative self-concept.  

Education for the culturally different and disadvantaged in the past has not had the same meaning that it has had for many middle-class Americans. While many disadvantaged people have a positive attitude toward education, their attitude toward the school is a negative one. Their reasons for education are frequently "vocational oriented" and the school does not meet their immediate needs; therefore, the disadvantaged look upon themselves as second-class citizens in the school.  

The cognitive style of the deprived and culturally different child does not easily make it possible for him to adapt himself to the "know-how" of school culture and of the middle-class generally. Listening, answering questions, taking tests and in later life, filling out forms for jobs and going for interviews are tasks for which he is not set to respond because of the oral and written stimuli. He "may use a great many words with fair pre-

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1Newton S. Metfessel and Mark W. Seng, "Correlates with the School Success and Failure of Economically Disadvantaged Children," Reading for the Disadvantaged, ed. by Thomas D. Horn, p. 76.


3Ibid., p. 229.
cision but unfortunately not those words useful in or representative of the school culture."¹

According to Johnson, many educators, sociologists, psychologists and others believe that cognitive development is impaired by the nonstandard dialect spoken by disadvantaged black children. Johnson disputes the argument of those who adhere to the cognitive deficiency point of view.

Because nonstandard Negro dialect is different from standard English, it's not automatically inferior. Further language is a tool of culture—a pure tool of culture. That is, the language of the people is always adequate to serve their needs—specifically, the cognitive needs of a people... Black children may lack some of the cognitive skills of middle-class children; on the other hand middle class children may lack some of the cognitive skills of black children. The point of difference is: difference does not equal inferiority.²

Baratz reports the results of a study which showed that Negro children performed significantly better than white children on repetition tasks which involved the use of non-standard sentences. According to Baratz, black children are generally not bi-dialectical. When they attempt to use standard English there is evidence of interference from their dialect. Accurate measurement of language of disadvantaged black children must involve mea-

¹Metfessel and Seng, "Correlates with the School Success and Failure of Economically Disadvantaged Children," p. 77.

sures of their non-standard English as well as their knowledge of standard English. It cannot be concluded that black children who do not speak standard English are deficient in language development.\(^1\)

Language divergence among black, economically disadvantaged children is currently being investigated by many linguists and educators as a causal factor in reading and academic failure.\(^2\) Goodman states, "the more divergence there is between the dialect of the learner and the dialect of learning, the more difficult will be the task of learning to read."\(^3\)

Rarely has past research taken into account the language of learning in the child's home. According to Spence, "...much of the available research fails to establish clear relationships between classroom performance and factors in the child's home environment." Transmission of information to children is affected by the difference between the language patterns used in school and language patterns used in disadvantaged homes.\(^4\)


Before the child enters school his foremost instructors have been his parents. Differences in mental ability, cognitive styles and language development have already been influenced by interactions between child and parent. These interactions can either raise or block the young child's ability to adopt the role of pupil when he enters the formality of the school classroom.¹

According to Hess and Shipman, the mother's language elaboration and how she feels about education, the school and her own ability to deal with the school system is significantly related both to the child's cognitive abilities and to his behavior in the school setting. For the majority of lower-class mothers, the school image is not one where the child has the opportunity for learning but is rather a place where he must follow rules and obey the teacher.

It represents an orientation toward authority and toward learning which has indeed been taught by the mother and by the community environment and which needs to be modified through experiences with teachers.²

The child's early development determines to a substantial degree how much profit he can derive from later experiences. His background may be deficient in language development. He may have already developed an attitude of


expecting failure. Most important, he may lack both the mo-
tivation to learn about his world and the background of con-
cepts that will make later learning possible. ¹

There is considerable evidence that a major deterrent
to learning among all types of minority students is the neg-
active self-image that students often possess. The child's
perception of himself develops in a large sense out of the
responses he receives from others. A child whose self-con-
cept is negative when he enters school usually discovers
early that he cannot meet the expectations of teachers and
fears their disapproval. ²

Psychologists have long known that "feelings are
facts," that if you are rejected for reasons beyond
your control you tend either to withdraw or to be-
come overly aggressive. If you feel unloved, you
cannot love; if you feel unworthy and unable, you
cannot achieve. ³

According to Pertz, the disadvantaged child's self-
image and self-identity depends very much on the rating,
norms and values set by peer groups. They are the "signi-
ficant others" in which he sees his self-image and reaches

¹Roslyn O'Brien and Phillip Lopate, "Preschool Pro-
grams and the Intellectual Development of Disadvantaged
Children," ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education
(Urbanna, Ill., College of Education, University of Illi-

²Paul H. Bowman, "Improving the Pupil Self-Concept,"
The Inner-City Classroom: Teacher Behaviors, ed. by Robert
D. Strom (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc.,
1966), p. 79.

³Muriel Crosley, "Meeting the Needs of Other Diver-
gent Learners," Administrators and Reading, ed. by
Thorsten R. Carlson (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich,
self-appraisal. "The child who moves toward the authority of the school and its goals may find himself in a limbo of non-identity."\(^1\) With the low socio-economic child the imposition of learning to read often represents an act of aggression by an unfriendly outside authority. It's "outside" because his parents rarely punish him for academic failure and his peer group rewards him for acts which challenge authority.\(^2\)

Fights and aggressive verbal and physical behavior are other factors which contribute toward limiting success in the academic situation. "Low-income families tend to tolerate less aggression within the family, either verbal or physical." However, these parents are more tolerant of aggression against those outside the family when such seems justified. Frequently in middle-class children, hostility is directed against parents. But in the case of the lower-class child, where there is a reading disability, the acting-out behavior will be against the teacher, school and peers.\(^3\)

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the literature for factors which influence and limit the disadvantaged child in academic achievement and in turn, test performance. One of the most important factors under discussion today is the limitations of standardized tests especially when used to assess potential and reading achievement of the disadvantaged child.

The development of the standardized test is seen as a response contingent upon the rapid growth of education in the United States. Some means of identifying the intellectual capacities of pupils in the schools was necessary.

Inadequate definitions of scope and object.-- According to Zach, difficulties were proliferated in proportion to the number of tests developed. She states that perhaps the greatest failure of the testing movement in the United States was the fact that "intelligence was only vaguely defined by the test maker, but the tests were used to define intelligence." 1

The cultural background can make a difference of as much as eight months in the linguistic development of children. Worley and Story quote McCarthy as stating that the social environment can either hamper or enhance language development because the content of speech is culturally determined and that its importance cannot be overemphasized. 2


Factors affecting and limiting test performance.--
Among the factors which affect test performance are speed, schooling, environment, language facility, motor co-ordination, physical handicaps, socio-economic class and others as yet not isolated. These factors may affect test performance individually or in combination. Adler indicates that these factors cause many psychologists, some anthropologists, and sociologists to question even the possibility of constructing a test which is free from cultural loadings.¹

Other authors, such as Karp, emphasize the difficulties of constructing a Culture Fair Test. The approach of test constructors in this regard has been to minimize verbal items and emphasize items requiring the other perceptual and motor functions. However, since interests, work habits, and problem solving attitudes originate largely from cultural conditions and influence the development of specific abilities, it cannot be assumed that nonverbal tests more nearly approach culture fairness than do verbal tests. The resulting constellation of factors sampled through measuring intellectual traits often reflect the values of the particular culture.²


In recent years, the black community has become more and more vociferous in its objections to the mental test as being biased against them.

The outcry has been especially strong against group testing because these tests depend almost entirely on the child's ability to read. Since the child has to read the questions in order to answer them, blacks question whether the test measures capacity to learn or ability to read. They also argue that IQ tests are self-fulfilling predictions. A child with a low IQ score is placed in slow learning classes, where he learns less, thereby supporting the original score.1

All reading tests are unfair to children having language handicaps unless the purpose of the test is to ascertain the degree of the handicap.2 The discrepancy between a child's language facility and verbal materials of standardized tests is realized more acutely in group intelligence tests.

Since the skills involved in learning to "read" a picture are apparently learned through examining pictures in books and other sources, asking questions about them and being stimulated to make judgments about these pictures, disadvantaged children often have not yet developed these skills...3

Arguments such as this have prompted many major school systems to abandon group intelligence testing. Individual tests such as the Stanford-Binet and the Wechsler Scales are less subject to criticism. The administration

1Zach, "The IQ Debate," p. 43.


3Nicholas C. Aliotti, "Ability to 'Read a Picture' in Disadvantaged First Grade Children," The Reading Teacher, XXIV (October, 1970), p. 4.
of these tests requires a psychologist or trained clinician who is able to evaluate better to what extent a given child's performance is influenced by emotional, motivational, educational and socio-economic factors.¹

Pettigrew maintains that even the race of the examiner can and often does interfere with the validity of the test. Even two-year-old Negroes seem verbally inhibited when tested by a white. He also stated that Negro children generally evidenced verbal comprehension superior to their verbal communication. One investigation had students of both races tested alternately by Negro and white examiners. For both groups, the mean IQ was approximately six points higher when the test was administered by an examiner of their own race.²

Positive and negative aspects of individual intelligence tests.— Although individual tests such as the Stanford-Binet and Wechsler Scales are acceptable in some respects, they fall within the range of criticism because the standardized population used in norming these tests was so different in background, experience and quality of education that the validity of interpreting test results for

¹Zach, "The IQ Debate," p. 43.

disadvantaged children is questionable. The inadequacy of standardized norms for Negro children not only affects their scholastic placement, but they are later hired or advanced on the basis of performance on such instruments.

Riessman indicates that individual IQ tests are not standardized for the underprivileged child when he suggests that performance tests should be employed wherever possible because of the vocabulary limitations of the disadvantaged child.

Riessman also points out the penalizing effect of timing which is such an important component of most standardized tests. The brief exercises and the general accent on speed in particular, work against the deprived child. His style is slow and cautious. It takes him a long time to become involved in problems and his potential will not easily be evidenced on short speed-oriented tasks. It has also been observed that children from minority groups work rapidly and randomly when speed is demanded, seemingly to "extricate themselves from the discomfort of the situation."

Perversion of test results.-- While there is no question that IQ tests supply information, the concept of the

2Ibid., p. 199.
3Riessman, The Culturally Deprived Child, p. 60.
IQ as a valid measure of intellectual capacity and potential has doomed many disadvantaged students to levels of educational attainment far beneath their potential.\(^1\) However, the failure lies not in the mental tests themselves, but in the perversion of the test results. Their limitations must be clearly understood and teachers should use such scores as "tentative" indicators and predictors of performance—not as infallible measures of ability.\(^2\) Zach states that "it is both unfair to the person tested and to the test itself to say that the scores of any one individual represent support for broad statements concerning human development."\(^3\)

**The Limitations of Standardized Reading Tests**

In order to evaluate growth in reading validly by comparing the performance of a particular class with that of a national norm, it is important to be sure that the population on which the test has been normed is comparable to the class on which it is being used. Socio-economic class, intelligence levels, and geographic area are variables which are relevant to growth in reading ability.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Webster, "Crucible of the Urban Classroom," p. 97.


\(^3\) Zach, "The IQ Debate," p. 66.

Not standardized and normed for minority groups.--
Serious questions have been raised concerning the validity of interpreting reading achievement test results for disadvantaged children when the standardized populations to which they are compared are different in background experience and quality of education.

In most instances the disadvantaged child is compared with middle and upper-class children who have been exposed to more substantial and stimulating educational circumstances.1

Culturally-biased reading selections.-- Although culture-fairness relates primarily to IQ tests, all reading tests are culturally unfair to children having language handicaps. Reading selections of many popular tests "turn off" minority groups instead of creating rapport. Also it is possible that a pupil who speaks and thinks in a dialect may need more than the normal time limits to render a passage in standard English into language of his thought.2

Discrepancies between tests in achievement results.--
In using standardized tests for diagnosing reading problems of disadvantaged children Cohen says that test norms are the least important factors to be considered.


What the teacher needs to know is the specific reading behaviors in which a student is relatively weak or strong, not how he compares with thousands of others. For this purpose the teacher should use a lower-level standardized test to help diagnose a student's reading skills.¹

The need to experience success is deemed particularly important for children of a deprived socio-economic background. Farr states

...the effect of using an inappropriate test with a student is a serious problem. If a test does not include enough lower limit for a poor reader and enough upper limit for a good reader an inaccurate estimate of reading ability results.²

While the reading comprehension test furnishes useful knowledge about a child's performance, it can go astray in many ways. Its diagnostic value and measure of school success or a child's real abilities is questionable.³ Part of the difficulty lies in the definition of comprehension as defined by test publishers, classroom teachers and school administrators. Since the goal of diagnostic teaching is to provide instruction based on individual needs and to determine progress toward specific goals, it is important that classroom teachers, administrators and test pub-


²Farr, Reading: What Can Be Measured? p. 16.

lishers are in reasonable agreement concerning goals. Otherwise, consequences are disastrous for education in general and for children in particular.¹

Discrepancies in grade level achievement between different reading tests vary greatly. What happens to scores when they are translated from raw counts of the number of items correct into "grade-equivalent" scores is worth noting. On some tests, a one-item difference in a raw score is equal to at least two months difference in grade level and at some points in the scale is equal to more than a year. According to Applebee, "stanines give a more accurate picture of achievement differences."² However, there are points on these scales where two items shift a score a standard deviation or more. It is usually at the upper end of the scale that single item differences make the most differences in levels of achievement. For students having reading problems such tests are likely to provide the least accurate assessment.³

Poorly-designed test formats and instructions.--
Poorly-designed formats and instructions on some tests are often inadequate for the disadvantaged child. This is especially true for the young child. The blame may perhaps

²Applebee, "Silent Reading Tests:" p. 92.
³Ibid., p. 93.
be attributed to the test-makers who have not given considerable concern to this area. Gaffney and Maguire report a study which indicates

...the data gained by means of an answer sheet from students in grades two and three did not meet acceptable validity standards regardless of the instructions given to the children.¹

Limitations of Oral Reading Tests

Oral reading tests have been used extensively to diagnose reading in general. Their worth as a valid device of measuring reading achievement is a source of controversy.²

The disadvantaged child of a minority group often scores low on oral reading tests. Because his oral dialect is often different from the written dialect, he may omit the plural marker or fail to sound the past tense on words he reads. Errors of this type are no indication that he cannot read but it may mean that he is a dialect speaker and reads the way he speaks. It is evident that the development of a more extensive series of reading passages that utilize the patterns of oral language structure used by the disadvantaged child is sorely needed.³

²Farr, Reading: What Can Be Measured?, p. 87.
These sources are just a sampling of the research available indicating the inadequacies of standardized instruction. "The major obstacle in testing and measurement today is the lack of a clear understanding of what the reading process entails."¹

Summary

Although the research in this chapter is rather limited, the writer has attempted to make an inquiry into possible causative factors which limit the disadvantaged child in academic achievement as measured by standardized tests. Such variables as ethnic and socio-economic background, experiences, environment, health, linguistic ability, cognitive development and self-concept are a few of the important factors in the life of a child which prepare him for the academic situation. Limitations in one or several of these influence to some extent the child's behavior and performance in learning.

Standardized tests are recognized as "tools" of some value in gaining diagnostic information in order to aid teachers in meeting the needs of individual children. However, research indicates that standardized tests do not adequately meet the needs of the child for whatever reason he is designated as "disadvantaged." It is apparent that classroom teachers, school administrators and test publishers must collaborate more closely and share a reasonable comparable goal for the use of these tests.

CHAPTER III

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

The purpose of this chapter was to search for findings or suggestions that have implications for teachers whose privilege it is to work with children who are "disadvantaged." The writer wished to relate these findings to the review of the literature in the previous chapter and to draw some conclusions as to how teachers can be helped toward a greater understanding of the problems confronting the disadvantaged child attending the Inner City school.

Understanding Problems of the Disadvantaged Child

To stimulate, cause and arrange for better learning is the special mission of the classroom teacher. This is especially true for the teacher whose work is with children attending the Inner City school. In her endeavor such a teacher must be cognizant of the problems of the disadvantaged child--his cultural and social background, his self-image and his motivational needs.

Cultural and social problems.-- It is of prime importance that the teacher recognize that often the disadvantaged child is a combination of two heritages or cultures--his original heritage and background and his acquired heritage and social background. The experiences of the school-
age child in his home environment often militate against those he acquires at school. The customs and values of his parents are often opposed to those customs and values which influence his life at school.¹

When aspects of the child's home culture are considered the knowledgeable teacher will seek to establish a relationship between the two cultures which will have a unifying effect. Acculturating the child into the mainstream culture, while helping him to understand the strengths of his original heritage rather than simply stressing superiority of an acquired culture, will be less painful when understanding of the dual nature of the child's culture takes place.²

Language problems. -- Many authorities in the field of linguistics and education attribute academic failure among children of minority groups to dialect differences and non-standard American English. Rystrom states, "...despite the reasons for wishing there were such a dialect there is no such thing as standard English." He strongly recommends the need for carefully designed and systematic research to determine if dialectal differences can be considered as one

¹Antoinette C. Davino, "Reading Programs for the Afro-American," Meeting Individual Needs in Reading, ed. by Helen K. Smith (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1971), p. 94.

of the inhibiting factors contributing to reading disabil-
ities.¹

Thus it is important for the teacher of children with
dialect differences and language variations to recognize
her responsibility in accepting with understanding and em­
pathy the language the child uses to communicate his needs
and thoughts. This does not imply that other acceptable
forms of English should not be taught but rather they should
be taught as alternate or substitute forms which the child
will have at his command when he needs to communicate ef­
fectively outside his home and environment.²

Self-concept and motivational problems.— The achieve­
ment of success in helping the disadvantaged child to func­
tion effectively in a regular classroom setting is due in
great part, to instill in the child a positive outlook. The
child with a negative view of self is a child who will not
be able to profit much from school. He is not motivated to
learn. The climate of the school should be appropriate to
the learner and set realistic standards for the child.³

The most effective teachers of disadvantaged children
are those who make sure that each child experiences

daily success in small ways in the classroom. No other task is more important, especially in the primary years than that of giving a child the feeling that he is important and that he can achieve success.¹

Meeting Special Needs

Health.-- As mentioned previously, many children from disadvantaged areas experience academic failures as a result of frequent absences due to illness. Other children are victims of severe social, emotional and physical problems that interfere with learning. The problems are often acute, and it is impossible for children to make satisfactory academic progress unless some attempt is made to relieve them. For this reason, it is vital that the school that hopes to meet the needs of such children must have knowledge of direct referral channels to community agencies that are equipped to meet the specialized physical and mental health needs of children.²

Teachers, especially primary teachers, play an important role here. The earlier a child's special physical or mental health needs are discovered and treatment is begun, the better are his chances for academic success.³ Therefore, teachers must avail themselves of the opportunity to use these supportive services and to obtain the training

¹Ebert and York, "Implications for Teachers:" p. 190.
²Ibid., p. 184.
that will enable them to readily observe these needs in children.

**Methods and materials.** In the United States the schools are largely dominated by middle-class teachers and administrators. Therefore the culture of the school reflects and points to the goals and objectives of the middle-class. With such a curriculum the culturally-different child is threatened and his growth impeded. Such a curriculum does not deal with the kinds of problems faced by most children coming from culturally-deprived homes and communities.¹

The learning style of the disadvantaged child is usually slow and cautious. His attention span may be short. Concrete concepts promote facility in learning whereas the abstract usually leads to confusion. It is the task of the teacher to select a combination of materials and methods which best enables the child to meet his needs and to experience success daily in the classroom.²

Part of the task of successfully teaching the disadvantaged child is in expanding the number and quality of experiences these children have. Inner-city children thrive on stimulation, motivation, care, interest and challenging


²Figurel, *Reading Goals for the Disadvantaged*, p. 3.
content material. Teachers can assist in this expansion of experience by making provision for such in the curriculum. However, Figurel warns middle-class teachers who teach in Inner City schools against spending too much time in "trying to make over disadvantaged children into children with middle-class mores." Such teachers strive to bring about change by providing poor children "with all the 'middle-class niceties' they have been denied, but in doing so, deprive these children of academic activities which would make a greater contribution toward reading progress."  

Teacher Implications in Regard to Testing  

Evaluation is an integral part of the instructional program and should provide information which can be used in improving instruction. Measurement has value to the extent that it results in better decisions which directly affect the pupil. These decisions include the adaptation of materials and instructional procedures to the needs of the child, diagnosis of his strengths and weaknesses, the extent of his skills. They also provide a model to show what is expected of him.  

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1 Ebert and York, "Implications for Teachers:" p. 188.  
2 Figurel, Reading Goals for the Disadvantaged, p. 4.  
Children are individuals and must be treated as such. Hence, it is imperative that the teacher of the disadvantaged child should be alerted to the limitations of tests. As Shepard states, "The first thing I ask is to quit teaching by IQ." He pointed out that the IQ is not a true indicator of ability. Background and experience, according to Shepard, affect academic performance. Often teachers are biased by IQ test results and expect the child to perform according to the potential indicated by such a test. Forgetting the IQ and working with and motivating the disadvantaged child will often yield better results.¹

In the selections of tests the teacher should be mindful that

Deprived children are less test conscious and are not accustomed to being evaluated. They have poor auditory habits, do not concentrate sufficiently on the examiner's instructions, nor pick up examinations readily, and in general are lethargic, apathetic, and ill at ease in the testing situation.²

The selection of tests should closely relate to the needs of the children. The test should be relevant, accurate and hold promise of little frustration. Consideration must be given to the differences in the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of disadvantaged children.

Teachers should be cognizant of the fact that norms are not the all-important factors in determining test re-

²Riessman, The Culturally Deprived Child, p. 60.
sults. They must take into consideration the element of "chance" existent in the pupils answering of certain ques-
tions. Frequently, post-test scores are the same as the pre-test scores but are more likely to indicate an accu-
rate index of a child's actual reading ability.\(^1\)

The teacher's own informal observations of growth are more significant than any other measures. As the teacher herself becomes more sensitive to the needs of her pupils, prescriptive teaching will follow. In addition to observ-
ations, informal tests based on the child's background and experiences will yield a wealth of information useful to the teacher. Such tests will help to develop in the teacher an awareness of the specific needs of her pupils.\(^2\)

**Teacher Training for Disadvantaged Children**

Training teachers for working with disadvantaged chil-
dren in Inner City schools has become a major point of crit-
icism. The current system provides teacher education courses prescribed by agencies that are often far-removed from the real-world needs of the teacher. This system ignores the reality that teaching competencies and knowledge vary ac-
cording to the location of the school districts and the lo-
cation of the school within a given district. Emphasis is

\(^1\)Farr, *Reading: What Can Be Measured?*, p. 149.

on teacher certification rather than on teacher effectiveness.¹

Clark is of the opinion that the most significant areas in which teachers of the disadvantaged are deficient are in social and cultural anthropology and psychology in terms of understanding the nature and characteristics of human differences.² In far too many situations, teachers do not possess the attitudes, understandings and skills needed to carry out innovative programs successfully. Institutions of higher learning are "derelict in fulfilling their responsibilities in providing the in-service programs which will bridge the gap between teacher competencies possessed and those which are required."³

In-service training in reading cannot be ignored if the needs of the disadvantaged and/or culturally different child are to be met. Reading is the tool for inducting the child into his culture most economically and basically. Differentiating instruction begins in the reading class. The teacher must be able to diagnose individual instructional needs and provide for the disabled reader. In-service training, therefore, must be geared toward the specific


Summary and Conclusions

The writer has attempted to bring together data which contribute toward an understanding of the disadvantaged child and the factors which limit his academic performance especially in reading.

The measuring of ability and school progress for many years has depended almost entirely on long-used standardized tests. In discussing factors which limit disadvantaged children in academic progress, the writer reviewed current literature regarding the uses and abuses of tests as a means of assessing potential and achievement of these children.

One of the conclusions reached by the writer was that Inner City school systems are caught up in the "snare" of the use of standardized tests as a means of evaluating the progress of children and indirectly, the effectiveness of teachers.

Children are assigned to groups, graded, promoted or retained partly in terms of how they perform on tests. The impact of test results not only affects the classroom but sometimes entire school systems and communities at large.

Since federal and state funds have been allocated for the use of schools and in particular, the Inner City school, assessment and appraisals have been enforced as a means of determining the pupils and school to which these funds will be available. Most often these appraisals take the form of the standardized test. Experienced teachers who work with the culturally different and/or deprived child question the validity of these test results as fair criteria for obtaining federal and state aid.

The results of such test data are frequently brought to the attention of the public through news media. The analysis of these data is often inaccurate. The public is further led astray when the news media show comparisons between school systems. These comparisons seldom take into account socio-cultural background, quality of teachers, economic status and the many other factors which contribute to maximum learning environment. Unfortunately reports of this nature encourage the lay public to conclude that teaching is poor in schools where children do not achieve the national norms. This implication affects the morale of teaching staffs and administrators.¹

From the review of the literature it was apparent

that teachers and school administrators hold in their hand the key to successful teaching of deprived and culturally-different children. To a degree, they need to ignore test results for administrative purposes while at the same time work toward making test publishers and other professionals removed from the "real-world" of teaching aware, that if standardized tests are to be the instruments of appraisal, then standardization and content must meet the needs of the population on which the tests are being used.

In the use of test results, teachers must realize the danger of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" of expecting and consequently, finding a low level of achievement. The key words for teachers of the disadvantaged are respect and expect. Shepard's statement--"don't teach as if you pitied these poor slum kids. They're not stupid,"--points out that more than empathy is required if teachers are expected to make school significant in the lives of these children.

The role played by the teacher will be the most significant factor in the attainment of the goals of the Right to Read effort in the next decade. Teachers must understand the reading process well enough that they can be true facilitators of learning. In understanding what children do as they read, teachers will be able to provide instruction that is relevant to the learner regard-

less of his background. "Process oriented" teachers will not be led astray by a false understanding of evaluation instruments.
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