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UNDERACHIEVERS IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

(TITLE)

BY

VEDA PARRISH

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ADVISER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. DEFINITION OF UNDERACHIEVER	3
III. UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND LACK OF INTELLIGENCE	4
IV. DOES UNDERACHIEVING MATTER?	7
V. THE KNOWN FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO UNDERACHIEVEMENT	11
VI. THE CLUES TO RECOGNITION OF THE UNDERACHIEVERS	19
VII. THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A CRITICAL PERIOD IN THE LIFE OF UNDERACHIEVERS	21
VIII. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN GUIDING THE UNDERACHIEVER	28
IX. SUMMARY	32
BIBLIOGRAPHY	33

I. INTRODUCTION

"If the present rate continues, one out of every three students now in the fifth grade will drop out before finishing high school" was a statement made by James E. Mauch, acting director of the Division of Program Operations, U. S. Office of Education, in a recent press interview. Though he gave no facts to support his statement, the idea expressed should be of concern to everyone.

Daniel Webster once said, "Education, to accomplish the ends of good government, should be universally diffused. Open the doors of the schoolhouse to all the children of the land." One ideal of American democracy is identified as education for all. Yet unless the present trend is reversed, one out of every three American fifth-graders will never finish high school.

Current concern about the school dropout is evidenced by the frequent discussion of this subject in professional publications and popular magazines; newspapers; radio and television programs; and institutes, conferences and meetings at the federal, state and local levels. These various studies and reports show that many of the best-known authorities in education today feel that a solution for the high school dropout is the most demanding of our immediate educational problems.

Even more startling is the report of the United States Department of Labor that 30 per cent of the dropouts leave school in the

eighth grade or before.¹ From current available research, there seems to be no definite evidence to show that early school experience causes these students to dropout. Then since the school is the only one having social contacts with all children, it is the best fitted to intervene before failure and dropout starts.

And so the school comes face to face with the problem of underachievement which is even more serious than the dropout problem. At least, in a study of existing research of underachievement compiled by C. B. and Jean Wellington, more superintendents listed the underachiever as their greatest single problem.²

¹U.S., Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "School and Early Employment of Youth," A Report on Seven Communities for 1952 to 1957, Bulletin No. 127 (Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 3.

²C. Burleigh Wellington and Jean Wellington, The Underachiever: Challenges and Guidelines, (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1965), p. 6.

II. DEFINITION OF UNDERACHIEVER

"Underachiever" is a term which has made an appearance in professional literature in Education within the last decade. In general use, it has come to mean "A student who appears to possess ability to achieve considerably higher grades than his present record shows."³ Either he almost fails or he achieves something that gives him no sense of success because it furnishes no challenge. Though the dropout rate is increasing to an alarming extent, at the same time school administrators are concerned with the fact that a too large a number of pupils in school are occupying space but are learning little.⁴

For the purposes in this paper, the "underachiever" can be defined as "one who stays in school, just getting by."

³Ibid., p. 1.

⁴Ibid., p. 37.

III. UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND LACK OF INTELLIGENCE

In the past the belief has persisted by many lay people that the underachiever is most usually due to either low mental ability or lack of application. While it is true these are factors to regard in the classroom, they are no longer being accepted as inevitable barriers to learning.

Various studies of underachievers and dropouts such as the one at Quincy have disproved the idea of low academic aptitude as the major factor. Paul A. Bowman and Charles V. Matthews found that the mean intelligence of the 138 dropouts studied was only one standard deviation below the classroom average with six students in the highest quartile and 25 in the next highest quartile.⁵

The United States Department of Labor reported in a study involving seven cities that 6 per cent of the dropouts had I.Q.'s above 110.⁶

The Illinois study revealed that though most of the dropouts were below average in intelligence, 14 percent were in the top 30 percent in academic aptitude and should have been capable of complet-

⁵Gordon P. Liddle, "Modifying the School Experience of Culturally Handicapped Children in the Primary Grades," Quincy Youth Development Project, (Chicago: University of Chicago, n.d.), pp. 1-10.

⁶U.S., Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, op. cit.

ing college.⁷

In the Higher Horizons study conducted in New York State, 12 per cent of the dropouts had an I.Q. above 110.⁸

Statistics for underachievers repeat the story. Lichter's studies for his book, The Dropouts, show that more than half of the underachievers had at least low-average intelligence and could be candidates for graduation from high school. In his studies, personality problems seemed to be a more frequent factor in their underachievement. He concluded that when personality problems are serious enough to interfere with school adjustment they will later interfere with work adjustment also.⁹

Robert Havighurst and Lindley Stiles reported underachievement was not necessarily a matter of specific disability to learn but more often a broad lack of general school adjustment. More often than not, the need to go to work was used as an excuse to avoid school. Their studies revealed that even these school differences and later dropout were only the final outcomes of a long chain of unique individual events and not the real cause of the maladjustment.¹⁰

During the first year of Project Head Start, a federally financed

⁷Promising Practices From the Projects for the Culturally Deprived, (Chicago: The Research Council of the Great Cities Program for School Improvement, April, 1964).

⁸M. Krugman, "Recovery of Lost Talent in New York City Schools," Year Book of Education, (1962), 426-437.

⁹Solomon O. Lichter and Others, The Dropouts (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962).

¹⁰Robert J. Havighurst and Lindley J. Stiles, "National Policy for Alienated Youth," Phi Delta Kappan, XLII (April, 1961), 283-291.

preschool program for culturally deprived children, lack of food was found to be a factor standing in the way of learner progress. Many children came to school with no breakfast. Others nibbled a piece of toast or ate a bag of potato chips. Some nutritionists have pointed out that much of the underachievement which is designated as laziness in reality is due to hunger and/or faulty eating habits. This is an area of concern which needs extended study.

IV. DOES UNDERACHIEVING MATTER?

Uninformed members of society may contend that schools have had dropouts and underachievers ever since and even before compulsory schooling began. Is there need for new concern? Although, more youths are remaining in school than ever before and no one can be sure that more underachieving goes on now than in the past since the underachiever is hard to locate because each is an individual case, the population increase attributed to World War II is placing 26 million new workers in the labor market between 1960 and 1970. At the present rate we will have 7.5 million new dropouts and 2.5 million of these will have less than an eighth grade education.¹¹ James S. Coleman in his report to the National Child Labor Committee states, "The low birth rate before 1946 was matched by a low rate of new job formation. Massive birth rate increases of the last decade require about 1.6 to 1.7 million new jobs instead of the .3 million increase of the present. Very few of those who would have been dropouts in the 1950's are finishing now. This affects between one-fourth to one-third of our youth. . . . Unemployed or underemployed they are dumped on the labor market with few jobs to absorb them. This situation is likely to become much more acute as technology advances."¹² For example, during

¹¹Daniel Schreiber and B. A. Kaplan, The School Dropout: Washington Project Dropout, (Washington: National Education Association, 1964), pp.5-6.

¹²James Coleman, "Alternatives for Joblessness," A Report to the National Committee on Youth Employment, American Child, XVI (May, 1964), 12.

the past ten years 50,000 elevator operator jobs disappeared in New York City alone. With improved equipment, six men with modern machinery can lay the same amount of track as one hundred "gandy dancers" did before. The requirements for a "gandy dancer" used to be a sturdy back; now some companies require a high school diploma. Manufacturers of electrical supplies are turning more and more to the use of automated examining equipment which replaces one hundred employees with four skilled ones. Agriculture which has long been a source of employment for unskilled labor is fast becoming more technological. A coal pipeline from West Virginia to New York employs five to ten men to operate it while 1,236 are employed by a railroad to move the same amount of coal. Banks are using machines to sort checks now.¹³

These are jobs requiring unskilled or semiskilled workers. With the approach of automation, this type of job is disappearing rather than the overall number of jobs because the AFL-CIO reports that for every one hundred skilled jobs in 1955, there were one hundred twenty-two in 1965. In his study Schreiber estimates that by 1970 only 5 per cent of the available jobs will accept unskilled labor.¹⁴

Questions arise as to what will become of these dropouts and underachievers. Will they be able to adapt to the problems and frustrations of the "work-a-day" world since they have not been able to make the adjustments required in school? According to Schreiber approximately one-third of the boys who cannot find jobs will hurry to

¹³Frederick Harris Harbison and Charles A. Myers, Education, Manpower, and Economic Growth, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

¹⁴Daniel Schreiber, "The Dropouts and the Delinquent: Promising Practices Gleaned from a Year of Study," Phi Delta Kappan, XLIV (February, 1963), 215-221.

enlist in the army. Another large fraction will have to leave their home communities to seek work in jobs where advancement is limited. Eventually one-third of this group will also attempt to enlist in the armed forces because of losing their jobs or because of the type of work they are forced to do.¹⁵

The studies^{16 17 18} show the female dropouts are fewer in number than in the case of boys. When dropouts do occur the cause is usually pregnancy and marriage. These teenagers, faced by the problems of managing a household, usually on a very meager income, and chained to rearing a family, are exposed to further frustrations by the scantiness of their experience and training.

Another factor to recognize is that while not all underachievers and school dropouts are unemployed and not all unemployed youths are juvenile delinquents, there is sufficient evidence to strongly suggest that the uneducated, the unemployed, and the delinquency prone may well be one and the same.¹⁹

The general behavior pattern of this kind of person is that he changes jobs frequently and has periods of time when he is a non-productive member of society. These periods of unemployment contribute to the unwholesome attitudes and habits which denote the delinquent.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Robert J. Havighurst and Lindley J. Stiles, op. cit.

¹⁷New York City Board of Education, The New York City Talent Preservation Project: An Interim Report, (New York: Board of Education, August, 1965).

¹⁸"Upward Bound," Expanding Opportunities: the Negro and Higher Education, II (Washington: American Council on Education, June, 1965).

¹⁹Schreiber, loc. cit.

So while the majority of these poorly educated persons are not and never will become delinquents, they still furnish numerous opportunities for the growing delinquency problem of the future.

America has remained strong and wealthy because education is provided for all people. However, our excellent educational system only provides the means to educate the child and does not insure that he will take advantage of what is offered. In the United States high school graduation is considered a minimum educational goal. How the schools solve the problem of underachievers--rural as well as urban--may well determine America's future.

V. THE KNOWN FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO UNDERACHIEVEMENT

There have been numerous studies of the characteristics which cause underachievement in school and research suggests that the actual causes are many and varied. No single incident produces an underachiever but rather a combination of conditions and situations. Although each pupil will not possess every characteristic, certain factors seem to be recurrent in research studies.

First, the home environment was unsatisfactory. This was due to various causes. Many were members of low income families or came from broken homes that were inadequate financially, emotionally and culturally. They might be members of large families where the mother and father were both employed and had too little time and energy left at the end of the day to care about the child's education. Two studies especially reported on family attitudes toward education.

In the Illinois study these facts were noted about the families of dropouts: "low educational attainment of parents, step-parents, and grandparents; low educational attainments of brothers and sisters; low occupational level of father; early marriages; and high physical mobility of the family. The child as a rule has not come from a home or neighborhood environment which places a high value on education."²⁰

In the Maryland study 70 percent of the mothers and 80 percent of the fathers were dropouts; 25 percent of the mothers and 30 percent

²⁰James E. Mauch, "One Out of Every Three," Illinois Education, LIV (December, 1965), 177-178.

of the fathers dropped out in the sixth grade; and 57 percent of the mothers and 63 percent of the fathers had gone no farther than the ninth grade.²¹

Fliegler and Bisch, in a summary of research on the academically talented student, found the child from the cultured home more likely to want to learn. He was not necessarily superior in ability; he seemed to have just developed his native abilities more. They reported that a study made by Findley in 1960 suggested that the average achievement of children of less favorable environment was six months below their potential ability while the average achievement of the children of more favorable environment tested only one month below their potential. Findley's summary revealed that the children of the lower environment showed a lower aspiration pattern, had less opportunity for privacy, had access to fewer and a poorer quality of books and magazines, and had less parental encouragement for regular attendance at school.

Fliegler and Bisch also included a 1954 study by Berdie showing the college-bound student was more apt to come from the home where values of higher education were stressed in early development of the child. A 1957 report of Haggard was included to show that 45 per cent of the high achievers tested had accepted adult values by the third grade.²²

²¹Paul E. Huffington, "Pupil Dropout Study: Maryland Public Schools," Stirrings in the Big Cities: The Great Cities Projects, (New York: Ford Foundation, 1962).

²²L. A. Fliegler and C. Bisch, A Summary of Research on the Academically Talented Student, (Washington: National Education Association and American Educational Research Association, 1959), p. 26.

Leonard M. Miller, in studying the underachiever with superior ability, became disturbed with the number from homes of intellectual excellence who were failing and rebelling. These children appeared to understand the value their parents placed on education but they would not accept it. The causes of this rejection were not certain but Miller came to the conclusion that possible there were personal interactions rooted deeper than the values of family prestige, social mobility, financial reward, and/or unsatisfied parental ambition.²³

The time at which underachieving begins varies from child to child but data by McClelland supported the hypothesis that higher achievement motives were developed in cultures and families where emphasis was focused on the development of individual independence. Low achievement motivation was associated with dependence on the parents and domination by them.²⁴ The study showed mothers who stressed early independent achievement had sons with higher achievement motivation.²⁵

So it can be safely assumed that socioeconomic factors by themselves do not explain the difference between the achiever and the underachiever. They are only one phase of the varying pattern.

Second, the underachiever can be found at all intelligence levels. Individual intelligence naturally should have a strong effect on achievement but current research suggests it is not a major factor as Part III of this paper shows. Many times students of average or

²³Leonard M. Miller, Guidance for the Underachiever with Superior Ability, (Washington: Office of Education, 1961). pp. 13-16.

²⁴David C. McClelland and others, The Achievement Motive, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953), pp.202-203.

²⁵Ibid., p. 384.

below intelligence overachieve far beyond their expected potential and just as often those above average do not measure up to their maximum expectations.

Third, emotional problems have been suggested as another factor for underachievement. Leonard Miller found in his study that frequently the student finds his ordinary home worries plus school demands too much, falters in school work, finds his trouble at home increased, and finally flounders badly. His study also showed anxiety even in the highest achievers whom it seemed to drive to achieve at all costs.²⁶

This region seemed so suggestive that the New York City Board of Education deemed it necessary to make a special inquiry into psychological health as a potential for underachieving. Early results indicated that emotional turbulence may underlie many learning disorders. No single emotional factor appeared but the problems did seem to fall into four groups. Approximately 30 percent of those studied showed only poor motivation and poor conditioning with no serious psychopathology. Another 10 percent disclosed acute situational reactions such as illness or problems with teachers. Evidences of relatively serious chronic neurotic problems seemed to be affecting 50 percent of those tested. The remaining 10 percent were in urgent need of immediate treatment without which they would be faced with serious danger to their health and welfare—dangers such as promiscuity, depression, and delinquency being the three found to be most prevalent. No outright cases of overt psychosis were located.²⁷

²⁶Miller, op. cit.

²⁷New York City Board of Education, The New York City Talent Preservation Project: An Interim Report, (New York: Board of Education, August, 1959).

A number of other studies have agreed that no difference exists between the underachievers and the other students but the criteria for selection of underachievers are not always clear and concise, so more data based on **presselected** criteria needs to be collected.

Fourth, in various studies, certain personality characteristics seem to keep reappearing: low motivation, low self-confidence, low capacity to function under pressure, low seriousness of purpose, low concern for others, low sense of responsibility, and low dominance.

Gowan, in reviewing a study made by H. C. Gough, noted that the underachievers studied had set no goals for themselves or had set impossible ones; were deficient in reading and arithmetic ability; didn't know how to budget their time wisely; seemed to have no serious interest; had few or no leisure time activities; weren't interested in other people; had little self-confidence; and showed psychotic or neurotic tendencies.²⁸

Lum found overachievers among college girls showed stronger motivation to study while underachievers tended to procrastinate and to rely on external pressures.²⁹

Leonard Miller also noted that besides emotional health these variables seemed to influence achievement: study habits, interest in the academic subject, regularity of school attendance, and personal standards of perfection consisting mainly of an unreasonably high neurosis or little incentive in life.³⁰

²⁸J. C. Gowan, "Dynamics of Underachievement of Gifted Students," Exceptional Children, XXIV (November, 1957), 98-101.

²⁹Mabel K. Lum, "A Comparison of Under and Overachieving Female College Student," Journal of Educational Psychology, LI (June, 1960), 109-114.

³⁰Leonard M. Miller, op. cit.

When underachievers were questioned about their abilities, many of their self-concepts agreed with the conclusions drawn from the research. The chief area of disagreement between the students and research seemed to be in their lack of a serious purpose. The students seemed to see themselves as very concerned over their underachievement and many declared that they felt guilty because they lacked motivation.³¹ Since there does seem to be many unexplained differences, further studies seem to be needed in this area.

Fifth, the ratio of underachieving boys and girls having the same intelligence level was two to one.³² Kenneth Parsley and Marvin Powell investigated the effect of sex differences on achievement of under, average, and over-achieving students within five intelligence groups in grades four through eight and reported that in these groups, the underachieving female did not rank as low as the male. This agreed with earlier studies^{33 34} of male and female underachievers.

Another study of motor characteristics of underachieving boys revealed that one-half of the younger boys in the Psychiatry Clinic School of the University of the City of Los Angeles had serious remedial needs in terms of motor performance plus other needs which they did

³¹C. Burleigh Wellington and Jean Wellington, op. cit., pp. 23-33.

³²J. C. Gowan, "The Underachieving Child: A Problem for Everyone," Exceptional Child, XXI (New York: Board of Education, 1957), 247-249.

³³Marian Wozencraft, "Sex Comparison of Certain Abilities," Journal of Educational Research, LVII (September, 1963), 21-27.

³⁴Kenneth Parsley and Marvin Powell, "Investigation of Sex Differences in Achievement of Under, Average, and Overachievers," Journal of Educational Research, LVII (January, 1964), 268-270.

not identify.³⁵ In another California study, it was reported that "overall findings suggest that a large proportion of children showing learning difficulties and/or poor classroom adjustment at pre-school or lower grade levels were handicapped by disabilities in visual perception."³⁶ These studies suggest a need for more comprehensive medical research into the background of underachievers.

The last factor of underachievement is the school. Educators and teachers have been criticized loud and long for this problem of underachievement. The charges levelled most often include: unchallenging teaching methods, lack of guidance, poorly prepared and unqualified teachers, and inadequate supervision.³⁷ In most cases these accusations are unjust. Teachers as a whole are hard-working and conscientious but they too have their limitations. It is a well-known and accepted fact that the dull child cannot conform to the standards of the bright but the problem is that the bright child can conform to the standards of the dull. He needs social acceptance so he adapts. Therefore it is difficult for the teacher to always be sure which ones are the underachievers who are capable of doing much more. It is almost impossible for the average teacher to get the tests and research materials which she would need to establish the identity of the true underachiever.

It is very important to be able to identify them as soon as possible because considerable evidence has been found that the child's political and social attitudes are formed by the time he reaches the

³⁵Jack Keogh and David Benson, "Motor Characteristics of Under-achieving Boys," Journal of Educational Research, LVII (January, 1964), 560-561.

³⁶Marianne Frostig, "Disturbance in Visual Perception," Journal of Educational Research, LVII (November, 1963), 160-162.

³⁷Leonard M. Miller, op. cit.

fifth grade and after that the teacher has to build on whatever has been set. So if he is to make the most of his own potentialities, his achievement and aspiration levels must be developed before he reaches the fifth grade. Boys begin to show clues of underachieving as early as the sixth grade.³⁸ Therefore the first five years should be "massive experiences of success."³⁹ The child should be repeatedly involved in effective learning activities to develop the skills and background necessary for later school achievement. "The youngster who fails in school, having discovered that he is good at nothing, stands a good chance of becoming good for nothing."⁴⁰ The under-achiever is one of this group. He clings to the belief that if he tries he can do it but he is afraid to try for fear of finding that he was wrong.

So a policy of retention should be applied with great care and discrimination. Each case must be viewed separately for the repetition of a grade may be useless and may even be harmful. The social and psychological problems involved with over-age pupils must be considered very carefully when setting limits for such a policy.

³⁸Robert L. Thorndike, The Concept of Over- and Underachievement, (New York: Bureau of Publications, Columbia University, 1956), pp. 66-67.

³⁹New York City Board of Education, op. cit.

⁴⁰Edgar Z. Friedenberg, The Vanishing Adolescent, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 17.

VI. THE CLUES TO THE RECOGNITION OF UNDERACHIEVERS

As has already been mentioned the underachiever is often hard to locate because of his chameleon-like character. A number of writers have suggested clues to recognizing the underachiever—the list which follows could be of assistance to teachers:

1. He procrastinates and relies on external pressure.
2. He shows less interest in reading.
3. He displays a negative attitude toward school.
4. He withdraws from competition.
5. He may show psychotic or neurotic tendencies.
6. He either sets no goals for himself or has impossible ones.
7. He exhibits no seriousness of interest.
8. He shows little or no interest in others.
9. He lacks self-confidence.
10. He has no enthusiasm for socialized activities.
11. He comes from a low socio-economic status family.
12. He may have marginal intelligence.
13. He may have low motivation due to previous failure.
14. He may have physical defects, especially poor vision or poor hearing,
15. He may have poor study habits.

Leonard Miller, by using state and national averages, prepared a typical profile of clues which the school might use to help it recognize

the underachiever and possible dropout while he is still in the middle grades:

1. He is ten years old in the fifth grade.
2. He has average intelligence.
3. He has managed to keep up with his class in promotions so far.
4. Reading is giving him progressively more trouble and is widening the gap between him and the upper half of his class.
5. His good behavior of earlier grades is turning to apathy.
6. He is held back at the end of the fifth grade.
7. His parents are dropouts.
8. His parents work long hours at odd jobs requiring little more than physical strength.
9. His parents have little time to encourage or help him.⁴¹

A word of warning might be injected here. These points should only serve as danger signals and not as positive identification. Each child is an individual and mass studies cannot be used as a solution.

⁴¹Leonard M. Miller, "The Dropout: Schools Search for Clues to His Problems," School Life, XLV (May, 1963), 55-57.

VII. THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

A CRITICAL PERIOD IN THE LIFE OF UNDERACHIEVERS

Education is morally bound to attempt a solution to underachievement. Educators and teachers, aided by the parent, must look for opportunities to forestall the future underachievers and also attempt to reach those already in the schools.

To do this, the school needs three basic programs--preventative, remedial, and enrichment. There are several programs now in operation in each group. Since group work with underachievers is a slow uphill process, it will take some time before statistical results will become apparent.

There is much current discussion about the culturally deprived. There is no culturally deprived child because every family has its own culture and cultural values. They should be called "culturally-different" because they cannot meet the norms set by society. Several preventative programs are in operation at the present time in an effort to remedy this need. Learning begins in the home but the culturally different child usually comes from a home neighborhood filled with unemployment, broken homes, homes with low standards of behavior, and poorly educated parents. No premium is placed on learning and few or no educational desires are kindled in the child. The school has the whole problem of finding ways to close the pre-school cultural gap between the underachiever and the middle-class child so that equal learning opportunities will exist for both at the beginning

of their formal schooling.

Schreiber in his 1957 New York City project, *Higher Horizons*, worked with 81 children from the third grade through junior high thirteen year olds. It was found the average individual intelligence could be increased thirteen points in three years by providing remedial reading and arithmetic; cultural enrichment by field trips to museums, theaters, and libraries; and improved home environment by social work with parents. The girls showed an average gain of eleven points while the boys gained an average of seventeen points. This larger gain was assumed to be due to the fact that they were lower at the beginning. In these tests 26 percent of the children studied scored 110 or above. When they were retested in 1960, the group with scores of 110 or above had increased to 58 per cent. Another interesting fact noticed was a ratio of five children with increased intelligence to every one who showed a decrease while three remained the same.⁴²

A 1962 study in Baltimore indicated that reading problems seemed to be a major factor in non-achievement so they began an Early School Admissions Project. The project centers were located in the poorer neighborhoods and included culturally-different children who would be entering school for the first time in the fall. The schools stressed communication experiences, health examinations, proper nutrition, rest, cultural as well as educational experiences, and group adjustments. Studies and long range evaluations will be made as the children advance.⁴³

⁴²Daniel Schreiber, op. cit.

⁴³Health and Welfare Council of the Baltimore Area, "A Letter to Ourselves: A Master Plan for Human Redevelopment," (Baltimore: The Council, January 18, 1962), 15 pp.

Kindergarten usually is considered as the first step in school but in 1964, only about 70 per cent of all five-year-olds were attending a school of any type. The per cent fell to about half this number in rural areas and the schools of the southern region.

An attempt being made to remedy this is Project Head Start, a giant federal prekindergarten program, created by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to give compensatory education to preschool children of low socioeconomic families. It was originated with the belief that the first five years of life are important and the sooner the deprived child's education begins, the greater will be the chance for developing his full potentialities. Head Start was launched in June, 1965, under the guidance of Dr. Julius B. Richmond. It has been almost immediately successful although it was conceived as a crash program and was hurriedly planned. It was to provide nationwide social services and nutritional aid to give these underprivileged youngsters the boost necessary to start to school in the fall on a more equal basis with children of greater economic and average cultural backgrounds.

Classes ran for a period of seven or eight weeks depending on the locality. They had a three-purpose objective; to supply the experiences and opportunities necessary to prepare children from underprivileged homes for school; to supply medical and dental examinations and remedial help; and to include social services for the children and their families. The school program started with a complete health examination, the first many of them had ever had. Small classes of not more than fifteen children allowed each child to receive individual attention. Activities rarely involved the whole group. Children worked and played in small clusters with an adult

nearby to answer the how's, what's, when's, and why's. A disadvantaged child must have much encouragement to ask the questions and learn the answers that a child of middle-class culture already knows. The program was active, allowing the children to use their bodies and senses in exploring and playing with commonplace toys such as blocks, tricycles, or dolls, and common household gadgets, namely flashlights and eggbeaters. This was the first experience many of them had ever had with simple things like these. The playground furnished a safe outdoor classroom for play, science lessons, and opportunities to study people engaged in their occupations. Good balanced meals and proper rest periods each had their place in the day of the small child.

Several satisfactory results have been noted: the development of normal childhood curiosity and suitable ways to express it; the stimulation of parental interest and concern with the achievement of their children—a healthy sign important to future school success; an interchange of information between teachers, doctors, social workers, parents, and other professional groups as they worked together and learned much about the children; and most important of all, every child was given the taste of success, which will pave the way for future achievement.⁴⁴

Several future tasks are planned for Project Head Start. Dr. Richmond outlined them thus:

1. A fall follow-up of the remedial work started on the health problems and the initiation of special programs to sustain the edu-

⁴⁴Francine Richard, "Giving Them a Head Start," Illinois Teacher, LIV (October, 1965), 62-67.

cational gains of the summer session including individual tutoring if necessary.

2. Development of a yearlong program to run concurrent with the school year for older children.
3. A summer Head Start program in 1966 for children not enrolled in year-round centers.

Dr. Richmond sees a possible long range goal, through funds furnished by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, where the Office of Economic Opportunity and the United States Office of Education working in conjunction with the different communities will be able to establish many local programs which reach beyond first grade to improve the lives of culturally-different children everywhere.

Dr. Richmond noted that the chief weakness in the Head Start program was that it doesn't reach all culturally different preschool children especially in the southern and rural areas where little had been done before.⁴⁵ It has been found that most culturally disadvantaged children, white as well as Negro, begin to experience an intelligence lag before they get to school. Therefore it is essential for them to become involved early in life before serious deprivation can have lasting effects.⁴⁶ Some schools, such as San Diego, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia, have a new policy which selects children who need extra help as they enter the first grade. Specialists working with small groups teach them to observe and listen. Tape recorders

⁴⁵Julius Richmond, "What's Ahead for Project Head Start," Grade Teacher, LXXXIII (December, 1965), 72-76.

⁴⁶Benjamin Bloom: Stability and Change in Human Characteristics, (New York: Wiley, 1964), pp. 68-80.

and dramatic presentations are used to help develop language skills and better communications. This special training is carried through the program into grade four.

Another promising development is the nongraded primary school which operates without grade designations and in which a year in school is not equated with a set amount of material to be learned. Children progress on an individual basis in the various subjects. This organization in grades one through three has special bearing upon the early acquisition of skills since many educators believe that it may be of help to a few children to be held back in the primary years of a graded school. It is in the primary grades that basic reading skills are stressed; reading content is narrative and secondary in importance to learning how to read. Beyond grade three, reading becomes a tool for learning and with the most stress placed on content and instruction in basic skills becomes incidental. Unless a child has mastered these early skills, he is likely to have considerable difficulty in reading and comprehending material found in the textbooks in the various subject fields. By grades seven and eight it may be too late for some pupils to learn what they might have learned earlier; by this time their difficulties may have become insurmountable.⁴⁷

At the fifth grade level, remedial and enrichment teaching need to be approached from a different angle. By this time it is too late for preventive teaching. At this age children are very active and need to constantly be on the move. Story problems, teaching games, and field trips, chosen by the class as an extension of some interesting problem

⁴⁷James Bryant Conant, Recommendations for Education in the Junior High School Years: A Memorandum to School Boards, (Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, 1960), pp. 20-21.

they have studied, help to fill this need for activity.

VIII. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN GUIDING THE UNDERACHIEVER

The teacher must accept the underachiever as he is and where he is, giving him as much assistance as possible. Since she is the closest person to the child, her role is an important one. She sees the child's needs better than anyone else—even his parents. So it is her responsibility to see that these needs are filled or brought to the attention of an individual who can fill them. What she does to help him solve his personal problems will condition everything else he does or tries to do.

To be an effective teacher she must use her personality as a major teaching tool. There must be a personal teacher-pupil contact which he can recognize as a genuine interest in each small gain he makes. She must be positive—never feeling sorry for herself or apologizing for the pupil's lack of ability. She must be patient, keeping her temper no matter what happens, never scolding, nor making caustic remarks.

The good teacher must study her underachieving student to locate incentives of motivation—becoming aware of the total way each individual behaves. Some respond to approval; others to grades. Many have to have direct instructions. Optimum room conditions have a direct influence in all mental attitudes. These are the incentives mentioned most frequently in research but since underachievement is so individual there must be many additional factors. Since motivation is so varied the teacher should select a large variety of appropriate instructional

techniques and attempt to fit them to each child's needs.

Frymier studied 1,050 elementary and high school students trying to find what motivated them to do good work. He noted that five types of responses accounted for about one-half of the total motivation: interested in the subject matter; liked the teacher and the subject; gained recognition by good grades or some other means; had good physical and emotional status; and had good physical factors (light, temperature, and distractions) in the classroom.⁴⁸

Since the underachiever needs extra help, the teacher must check carefully to see that assignments are carried out and also to note those areas where the pupil still needs help. Her assignments must be clear and exact, preferably written on the board as she speaks, to insure that no one misunderstands her. This gives each student time to copy them in his notebook and ask questions about anything he doesn't understand. Any written assignment for underachievers cannot be imaginative. It must be something the student has seen or done. Homework should be kept to a minimum and the work assigned should be very specific. She should never assign new material which has not already been discussed in class. Most of his studying should be done under her supervision.

During recitations questioning should be "how or why" questions with obvious answers or ones easily reasoned out. The questions should be kept in sequence of known or given facts. They should never start with "what about" or "how about"; "how do you feel"; or "discuss." She

⁴⁸Jack R. Frymier, "Study of Students' Motivation to Do Good Work in School," Journal of Educational Research, LVIII (January, 1964), 239-243.

should never use ridicule if he does not know the answer. Visual and other aids should be used to give concreteness and reality to all ideas. Unimportant but interesting details should be added to make a clearer picture.

Reviews should be used daily to build subject matter of a topic, heading, or unit cumulatively. Another overall review should be made at the end of the unit or section for the purpose of recall of the concepts in their proper perspective. There should be a term-end review of the whole subject, stressing the same facts as were studied the first time.

Indirectly or directly the teacher is a force in bringing other means to bear as aids to the underachiever. Among these can be mentioned the following:

1. Interesting the parents in the school program. Most parents are interested in the school but are afraid to take part for fear the school will not welcome them. This is especially true of low-income families who feel their aid and opinions are not of any value. They must be shown that they, working as a team with the teachers, are an essential part of the education of their child.
2. Retraining of teachers. The current school problems must be attacked with modern educational purposes and techniques. Teachers are receiving in-service training, listening to lectures by qualified personnel, and taking part in discussion groups in an effort to employ the most effective known methods of teaching.
3. Increasing use of educational television. Television in the school can bring special experiences, sights, and sounds which would be impossible for the school to duplicate. The programs are planned

and produced by specialists with a definite purpose and special age group in mind.

4. Growing supplies of other teaching aids which can make learning more concrete for the underachiever. A growing list of colored and black-and-white films, are available from private and public sources-- many of them free. Individual strip film projectors are provided which the child can use at school or take home to study a special assignment. More and more reading materials are being supplied on all subjects at graded levels where even the poor readers can find stories and information of interest to them.

5. Increasing emphasis on nutrition. Breakfasts have been added to the free lunch and limited medical services usually furnished by schools. Classes in nutrition for mothers help them buy more wisely and plan more nutritious meals. Sewing classes have special emphasis on making and remaking clothing for the family.

More and more attention is being centered on the underachiever and his special problems. As the programs progress probably numerous other problems will appear.

IX. SUMMARY

Education can no longer neglect to utilize the vast resources being wasted in the large group of underachievers found in our school population.

It is in the interest of their own individual well-being, as well as in the interest of the national welfare, that the unused talents of these "educational drifters" should be early discovered and subjected to thorough training for use. A majority of them have both the capacity and willingness to learn. The goal of equality of opportunity to which our democracy subscribes cannot be achieved so long as this group is neglected. These millions of underachievers must be supplied with the tools of communication which are the means of developing them to be more effective and fruitful citizens in all walks of life.

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