The culturally deprived child is described as one who cannot benefit from the educational opportunity that a society may grant for the development of the individual's potentiality to the fullest extent, and an inability to exploit the opportunities for employment that society may provide. It is suggested that sensory deprivation studies on animals cannot be appropriately replicated in the life patterns of disadvantaged children. Not all children who grow up in a disadvantaged environment suffer because of it; indeed some of them get to be as brilliant as the children from advantageous backgrounds. A threshold hypothesis is advanced at this point: if we recognize a threshold for intellectual capacity, children above this threshold are hardly affected by the usual disadvantageous conditions, whereas children below this threshold are affected strongly by these conditions. Efforts at stimulating early environment can thus be beneficial only for those who are below the threshold. Some strategies for remedial education are also discussed.

J. P. DAS*

Cultural Deprivation: Euphemism and Essence

It would appear to a visitor to the North American continent that the term "cultural deprivation" is used more as a euphemism than as a useful term whose meaning is apparent. The words are applied to poor or underprivileged people. Very often these people are Blacks, Mexican, Indians, poor Whites or the lower class immigrants to North America. However, what is more harmful is that the word is used to cover up some existing deficiencies or, you might say, inefficiencies in these groups, and to give the inefficiencies a glorified status. The defects we notice in the underprivileged groups are defects, of course, only in a relative sense. Anyone who has done some thinking in this area would not be so misinformed as to say that these defects are absolute in the genetic or the environmental context. The so-called defectologist point of view of cultural deprivation is consistent with the underachievement of the children from these groups in scholastic subjects and their lower potential for employment when they leave school. There is no doubt that the cultures of these groups are themselves quite complex, or in the case of the new immigrants, their past cultures could even be superior to that of the frontier culture that prevails in most of the North American continent. Nobody denies the fact, for example, that the Black child growing up in the ghetto requires certain special skills to survive and that these skills are lacking in the so-called advantaged child who might

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live in the suburbs. Those who oppose a defectologist viewpoint of cultural deprivation insist typically on facts like this: that the ghetto child or the slum child does have superior skills in many respects — and if that is so, why call him deprived or defective? In defense of the defectologist theory of cultural deprivation one may say that cultural deprivation is defined in a rather narrow sense. That is, in terms of academic achievement in school and freedom of choice for occupations in adulthood. In both these aspects the presently designated culturally deprived child lags behind.

As opposed to the defectologists, there are those who might be called the romanticists or the humanists. They generally make two points. One, that deprivation or disadvantage cannot be identified or limited to any one group, and the disadvantaged people are not disadvantaged. What is disadvantaged or inadequate is the school program, or in other words the process of education. The disadvantaged child does not fail in school, rather the school has failed him.[1] A variation of this first point — that all of us are disadvantaged to a certain extent and that disadvantaged characteristics may be found in slums as well as in suburbs — is that everyone has a culture and no one is really "culturally" deprived. My first reaction to statements like this is that they distract the social planner from focusing his efforts at alleviation on a particular area or on a particular group and in this sense such a view is definitely harmful. Nobody argues with the fact that even in affluent homes the child may not be receiving the stimulation that he should receive for developing his full potential. But in fighting a social evil or a social problem we are not required to focus on individual instances of a sporadic frequency. We should proceed with a structurally defined group and area. The situation is similar to that of a medical team which is trying to fight an epidemic. If we distract the team by giving it information of sporadic cases of the disease in far away places, the remedial measures would have no effect. Thus, recognizing that conditions which favour cultural deprivation may exist in the suburbs, one should concentrate on the slums for an expedient method of fighting the ill effects of cultural deprivation.

A naive interpretation of the defectologist's point of view, however, may lead to ridiculous conclusions. For example, anyone who has gone to visit the northern parts of Alberta and found that the special classes in the schools are sometimes completely filled with native Indian children may come back with the feeling that the native children are all slow learners or mentally retarded. The true defectologist would point out here that the culture of the native Indian home is not congruent with the demands of white Canadian Society and as long as the native Indian is obligated to live and function in the white Canadian society these children should be trained and shaped for such demands. Of course, one may

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[1]M. D. Fantani & G. Weinstein, *The Disadvantaged* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

argue here that we should leave the natives as they are and not interfere with them. In fact such a point of view may earn the sympathy of many intellectuals who feel guilt-ridden to find the low social status of the native Indian and feel that they or the actions of their forefathers are responsible for the plight of the Indian. The so-called hands-off movement in relation to the Indians is obviously inappropriate. We should ask ourselves how the Indian has come to be what he is now, that is, completely without an occupation and dependent on welfare. A study of their antecedent history would reveal that they have been reduced to depend on welfare and therefore are inactive because of the interference of the white man as an intruder. Now at this point to leave them as they are after having made them unfit to live in our culture would be cruelty.

The pragmatic approach to the whole question of cultural deprivation would be to recognize that through history and through circumstances certain sections of our people cannot take advantage of the opportunity and freedom which a majority of our society enjoys. One should recognize this and find methods of correcting such inequality so that the theoretical goal of democracy — which is to provide equal opportunity for each member of the community to develop his potentialities to the fullest extent and to exploit the resources and enjoy the advantages of his society — may be realized in practice.

The context in which the term "cultural deprivation" is used is environmental because cultural deprivation refers to a complex set of conditions which favours intellectual subnormality in a child. Some of these conditions are an unstimulating environment in which a child grows up and a lack of verbal commerce with adults. The impetus for work on cultural deprivation has come from the research on early experience and sensory deprivation in comparative psychology.[2] Following the work of Hebb on animals who were raised in restricted environments, and were found to have retarded sensory and perceptual development, a number of psychologists (for example, McV. Hunt) have maintained that the single contributing factor to cultural deprivation is the poor verbal and intellectual environment in the early life of the disadvantaged child. Psychologists maintain that even the inherited constitutional apparatus concerned with cognitive and sensory functions might undergo modifications as a result of impoverished environments so that later stimulation would not bring such children up to the level of the advantaged children. Numerous studies on animals showing the effect of an enriched early environment on the later growth of discrimination learning and problem solving abilities have been conducted and these in turn have been duplicated with the human infant. When the several types of stimulation provided by pre-school educational programs such as Head Start do not

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[2]J. T. Tapp & H. C. Haywood, "Experience and the development of adaptive behavior," in N. R. Ellis, editor, *International Review of Research in Mental Retardation,* I (1966), pp. 109-151.

produce lasting effects on the cognitive growth of the slum child, the usual explanation has been that the programs did not start early enough. The concept of "critical period" analogous to "imprinting" in animals has been evoked at this point, and the protagonists of early experience programs state that once we catch hold of the infant, soon after birth, and subject him to our intellectually stimulating program we will have no trouble in establishing the efficacy of projects such as Head Start.

However, in recent years there has been some reexamination of the animal data on restricted environment and their application or extension to humans.[3] For example, it is seen that even in animal studies when an animal is brought up in a lighted environment and not in a dark one, all other conditions being constant, the animal typically does not show the ill effects of sensory deprivation. Secondly, animals which have been reared in a restricted environment do show initial disadvantages in discrimination learning but such disadvantages gradually disappear with exposure to a normal environment. In other words, the gap between the sensory deprived animals and those who are reared normally begins to narrow as the deprived animal is increasingly exposed to a normal environment following its early exposure to a restricted one. In the case of human children, however, the opposite is known to happen. The gap between a culturally disadvantaged child and a non-disadvantaged child begins to grow with age and exposure to normal classroom learning. The notorious I.Q. tests reveal a wider and wider gap between, say, the Black and the middle class White child as they progress in school years. Such considerations lead one to question the validity of extending, if there is any validity at all in the first place, our findings with the animals to the culturally disadvantaged child. Also the myth that the slum child has much less stimulation than the middle class child is no longer supported. A close examination of the typical day by day life of the slum child reveals, as we know now, that he might be really overstimulated and overindulged by adults. There is always someone in the lower class home, an aunt or a grandmother, who cuddles and fondles the slum child. So if the slum child does not lack stimulation, if he does not lack maternal love, why is he disadvantaged?

The neo-early experience theorists believe that it is not stimulation *per se* but the quality of stimulation that is important.[4] The middle class child most often has a superior quality of both verbal and nonverbal stimulation. These stimulations are distinct. The reinforcement systems in a middle class home are of a delayed kind which is congruent to adult life; and certainly the verbal milieu in which the middle class child grows up corresponds much more closely to that found in academic textbooks and in school learning situations. All in all, language is given a very

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[3]A. R. Jensen, "Reducing heredity-environment uncertainty: A reply," *Harvard Educational Review,* 39 (1969), pp. 449-482.

[4]H. C. Haywood, editor, *Social-Cultural Aspects of Mental Retardation.* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970).

important role as a determinant for the growth of intellect. However, there are even disturbing facts about this explanation.

The typical example given by social linguists like Bernstein[5] who try to explain why the lower class child falls behind in academic performance compared to that of the middle class child is that the language of the lower class child is of a descriptive nature while that of the middle class child is of an analytic nature. And because analytic language is the key to success in academic subjects and is increasingly demanded in higher learning, the lower class child has to assume an inferior status due to his verbal experience. It is further stated by these theorists that verbal stimulation must begin and be maintained at a critical period of life, preferably around age 4. Since the lower class child lacks such experience or has very little of it during this critical period he remains at a lower state of verbal development throughout his life. As was said before, these statements have now been questioned.

Biologically oriented linguists such as Lenneberg[6] maintain that language development indeed takes a normal course if it is not severely interfered with. That is, if attempts are not made to deliberately deprive the child of verbal experience then language development proceeds normally. The haphazard experience that characterizes most of our early verbal development is adequate enough. Lenneberg has shown, for example, that the children of deaf parents do equally well in school as the children of hearing parents, even after the first year of school. If intensive and qualitatively superior verbal experience is needed for academic success in later years the evidence is lacking when we examine the linguistic skills of such special groups as children of deaf and mute parents. Bernstein and other social linguists also indicate that the language of the lower class child at home is not the same as the language used at school, and this disparity is not present in the case of the middle class child. This is, according to them, an important reason why the lower class child does not perform as well as the middle class child. Again, Lenneberg and others would maintain that from a cross-cultural perspective such disparities do not seem to matter at all. For example, in many countries the language spoken at home is structurally different from the language used at school. The minority groups in Europe or the minority groups in certain regions in India use a completely different language at home and read and write in another language at school. But one does find academically successful people in these groups and sometimes a few Nobel laureates. The poor Jewish immigrant from Europe who arrives in the English speaking communities of the United States and who already has been exposed to more than one language soon catches up with the American school system and succeeds in it. In Japan, children may speak many kinds of dialects at home, but

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[5]B. Bernstein, "Social structure, language and learning," *Educational Research,* 3 (1961), pp. 163-176.

[6]E. H. Lenneburg, "On explaining language," *Science,* 164 (1969), pp. 635-643.

use one language at school. Their intellectual development, if anything, is as adequate as that of the unilingual middle class American child.

A way out of this apparently contradictory evidence is provided by assuming a threshold. The threshold hypothesis advocates that if the child is born with a certain level of intelligence which could be defined as above a normal threshold then the usual amount of disadvantageous experiences do not destroy his capacity. During the last world war, children who grew up in a devastated country like Germany and were literally garbage can pickers have turned out in later life to be highly qualified professional people. In another culture like that in India there are many examples of children who were tending cows or goats until they were 12 years old and then were picked up by someone, put in a school, and have become judges or vice-chancellors. The threshold theory is further supported by the fact that in a generally depressed community or society, occupational status bears little relationship to intelligence. In other words, intelligent children are not exclusively found among the rich. The socioeconomic level of a person typically does not show the same correlation with intelligence as it does in the industrialized Western society. One may extend this to the depressed communities in the Western societies and conjecture that among the Blacks or the Indians those who have gone into higher occupations are not necessarily more intelligent than those who have not. Perhaps they are a little more lucky.

If we accept the threshold hypothesis, what do we say about the programs for enhancing the quality of early experience? One may still support them for those who are below the threshold. In these cases there is perhaps a certain danger that unless the inherent capacities are adequately stimulated they may deteriorate further and hide the actual potentiality. Thus project Head Start programs should be limited to those who have intelligence below this threshold. One may assume that if the programs are appropriate and adequate the performance of these culturally disadvantaged children may be boosted up to the level of a normal child.

In case of those bright children who belong to the disadvantaged class one would do well simply to remove the barriers against scholastic achievement. What we are pleading here is not for an enriched intellectual program to be forced down on them. In fact, this will be not only unnecessary but may slow down the normal intellectual growth of the bright child. We are merely asking to let this child acquire knowledge in his own way by providing him with physical facilities such as a library or a place to study and psychological conditions conducive to higher learning. The latter would include appropriate teacher expectancy and to some extent encouragement from parents for higher education.

The nature-nurture controversy has been recently highlighted by an article of Jensen[7] and the several replies and rejoinders to his article.

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[7]A. R. Jensen, "How much can we boost I.Q. and scholastic achievement?" *Harvard Educational Review,* 39 (1969), pp. 1-123.

The portion of the article that concerns us here is the relation between intellectual development and socioeconomic status. Jensen assumes that intelligence has two basic components: an associative component which is displayed in associative learning situations such as rote learning, and an abstraction and reasoning component which is displayed in symbolic manipulation such as mathematical skills. Our common intelligence tests are heavily biased on the abstraction and reasoning component rather than on the associative learning component. The first ability (Level 1), that is associative learning, is normally distributed in both lower and higher classes. The second ability (Level II), that of reasoning and abstraction, is unequally distributed for these two classes. The higher class is assumed to have a greater proportion of the reasoning and abstraction ability than the lower class. As a result the lower class child does very well in associative learning situations and sometimes, paradoxically, would do better in these situations than an upper class child of equal intelligence. However, he is inferior to the upper class child in mathematics and skills that require symbolic manipulation. As we know, verbal skills also require the ability to abstract and generalize, and the more refined the skill, the greater is the demand on these abilities. Jensen's assumptions then would be consistent with the findings of Bernstein who maintains that the linguistic code of the lower class is restricted compared to the elaborate code used by the middle class person.

Jensen suggests that the disparity in the distribution of Level II ability has a genetic basis, that low and high socioeconomic groups have been genetically separated so far as this ability is concerned. If we assume that it is not genetically determined, and that the threshold is not inherited, how can we explain the differences in the performance of the low and high socioeconomic classes in school subjects in particular and intellectual spheres in general?

The environmental answer would first assume that variations in Level II ability across social class reflects a difference in cognitive style rather than cognitive competence. In certain subcultures, analytic modes of speech and reasoning are encouraged and reinforced whereas in others, direct and descriptive language is normally used. The child in each subculture notices this early in his life and conforms to the norm.[8] As he grows up, the prevalent mode of the subculture is interiorized and established as his cognitive style. This is a familiar example of social conformity. However, the cognitive style in question is "disadvantageous" to the child for scholastic achievement. In the absence of social mobility from low to high class for a few generations, the style becomes a stigma.

Thus the social-cultural history of a subculture or an ethnic group determines to a large extent its present performance. Even if some individuals move out of the subculture, the impression of their former culture may not fade in one generation. This is why the Black middle

[8]M. Deutsch, "Happenings on the way back to the forum: Social science, I.Q. and race differences revisited," *Harvard Educational Review,* 39 (1969), pp. 523-557.

class child may still be disadvantaged, or the native Canadian child may not show progress under a stimulating educational environment.

The social-cultural history of an ethnic group or subculture influences its goals and expectancies. Human beings are unique in that they not only adapt to their physical environment in an advantageous manner but also to their symbolic environment. Identification with a group brings with it specific attitudes and expectancies. Expectancies are learnt and generalized. For example, consistent failure following a group's effort to improve its status and to avail of the opportunities enjoyed by other groups may breed a generalized expectancy of apathy and reconciliation, and even negativism. It also influences the interaction of an individual with his meaningful environment. The children and adults in these groups would tend to believe their actions externally controlled, by chance or fate rather than by one's own skill. Such expectancies are known to be related to school success — a belief in internal control is conducive to scholastic achievement.

With the preceding discussion in mind, what are the possible strategies for change? One approach illustrated in project Head Start and other compensatory education programs has been to stimulate the culturally deprived child intellectually so that he may be able to develop an analytical language system and an ability to reason and abstract like middle and upper class children. These remedial measures or early experience stimulations have typically been given at age 5. Most of them do not show very much of an effect, or at least not much of a lasting effect. The advocates of these early experience programs however say that the fault does not lie with the program itself but the age at which a deprived child comes to be included in their program. They recommend that the child should be included in their program shortly after birth, or as soon after birth as possible, and this would not only bring him to the same level of scholastic performance as an average middle class child when he enters school, but the skills that such a child has acquired would be permanent.

Without entering into the controversy over project Head Start, let us consider the basic question. The general strategy adopted in these projects or programs can be described as a "more of the same" strategy. If the child is deficient in language he needs a more intensive training for language skills. If he is deficient in numerical concepts let us give him more drilling on the same. In other words, all that a deprived child needs is an intensification of the same kind of training that a middle class child receives. There might be a fallacy in such a strategy. As an analogy let us examine the methods adopted to fight malnutrition in poverty-stricken children. Very often it is found that the so-called poor or low class child may be given a higher quality of nutrition than the middle class child, but the gain in weight and height is not the same as that of the middle class child. In other words, better nutrition *per se* does not improve the physical growth of the lower class child. One of

the apparent reasons for such disparity is the fact that we are here neglecting the total environment in which the lower class child lives and concentrating merely on the nutritional aspect of his environment. Very often he lives in unsanitary conditions where infections and epidemics are chronically present. Thus the higher quality of food that the welfare agency may provide cannot be properly assimilated and does not contribute to the growth of the lower class child. Obviously, the more-of-the-same strategy here would be quite inadequate.

If we extend the analogy to our efforts at improving the scholastic achievement of the culturally deprived child we can see that an intensified program for improvement of linguistic or conceptual skills would not be adequate. Two approaches at altering the performance of the disadvantaged child in school may suggest themselves. The ideal thing to do, of course, is to banish poverty and inequality that exists between the social classes and in their living conditions. This would require the poor and the underprivileged class to be elevated in physical-social environment to the level of the average middle class. Although this is very desirable and should be done ultimately, it is not very practical at this point unless one is thinking in terms of drastic social changes equivalent in extent to social revolution. The other alternative, perhaps a little more practical (albeit somewhat reactionary in its support of the status quo), would be to change the goals, expectations and basic attitudes in the culturally deprived parents and their children. These are the internal or the autochthonous factors. Human beings have a distinct advantage in that they can typically overcome unfavorable physical-social environment, as has been demonstrated historically, by restructuring the symbolic environment of goals and expectancies. It is widely known that parental expectation of a child's school achievement provides perhaps the single major factor which contributes to a child's academic performance. And this is especially relevant in depressed rather than in affluent communities. Therefore, any program for intellectual stimulation of the deprived child is bound to be short-lived, unless one also attempts to change these internal factors which guide the interaction of the disadvantaged group with the environment.

Let us engage in an exercise of building the utopia by conjuring up a situation where a group of native Canadian children has been handed over to some enlightened educators for improving their cognitive competence.

How would our educators proceed? First of all, they should know the autochthonous factors that hinder scholastic attainment. The most important among these would be parental expectancy. Both financial and emotional support is necessary for educating the child. However, where the parents expect the child to progress in school, economic disadvantage does not depress the child's school achievement. In a study in Trinidad conducted by a graduate student from the University of Alberta, parental

expectation emerged as the single major factor responsible for the scholastic performance of children.

Goal-setting and expectancies are verbally mediated, and thus can be changed by restructuring a parent's attitudes through discussion. This should give our educators hope that even when negative expectancies and inadequate goals are present in the culturally disadvantaged parent, these can be altered.

But this cannot be achieved without an appropriate change in the belief system regarding the casual nature of "behaviour-outcome sequences". A person modifies his subsequent responses on the basis of the outcomes of preceding ones. But this happens only when he believes that the rewards and punishments received are contingent on his action. Without this belief, the actions and the outcome may be perceived to be fortuitous or controlled by chance. The external-internal locus of control variable is thus closely related to a person's interpretation of success and failure. It is observed that inability to conceptualize failure coexists with external control, and a child or adult with this belief typically tries to avoid failure than achieve success.[9], [10]

One cannot change the belief from external to internal control easily among the native Canadians. However, for a limited group of parents and their children, it is quite possible to design situations where internal locus of control can be demonstrated in regard to the child's progress at school. Through shaping and reinforcement, our experimental group in Utopia could be made to dissociate school learning from the rest of their reality, and made to believe that at least in this sphere, fate does not control a child's successes.

The utopia will not be able to sustain its gains if no attempt is made to improve the reality. Thus ultimately the people in power have to prove to the native Canadians that when their children are educated, they have opportunities for social mobility. As an exercise in our skills for behaviour engineering, the experiment outlined above should be carried out. Even if a few of these disadvantaged children can be made to succeed, they will provide a model for the community, making it easier for the educator to succeed in his subsequent efforts.

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[9]R. L. Cromwell, "A social learning approach to mental retardation." In N. R. Ellis, editor, *Handbook of Mental Deficiency* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963).

[10]J. B. Rotter, "Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement," *Psychological Monographs*, 80 (1966).