

Chapter 2

The Concept of Educational Disadvantage and Some Implications for the Classroom Teacher

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I should like to talk to you about a matter which was a great concern to Ruth Wong, as it is to me—the question of what ‘education’, in the broad sense, can or should do to alleviate the plight of the many millions of the world’s children, who, for one reason or another, are unlikely to live full, healthy, productive and happy lives as their more fortunate fellows. ‘Disadvantage’ has been interpreted in many ways. Indeed, each of us has his or her own concept of what constitutes the term, just as each of us has personal ideas about ways of eliminating or minimizing its effects. What I have to say represents my own feelings and opinions. I hope you will forgive me if I begin with some general ideas, one or two of which may seem a little academic, but I think it is important to be clear as a great deal of damage has been done because of confusion of thinking.

Let me first nail my colours to the mast. My concern is with children as children. I believe that programmes for the prevention, elimination, minimization or alleviation of disadvantage, as described and defined in the way I propose to use the term, should be designed specifically for children as individuals in terms of the nature of their specific disadvantage rather than for institutions or social groups. That is, I shall not talk about ‘disadvantaged schools’, ‘disadvantaged minorities’, ‘disadvantaged social classes’ and so on. I consider that institutionally directed programmes rather than child-centred ones tend to fail. Let me repeat—I plan to talk about ‘disadvantaged children’ and about some aspects of educational programmes for them. One further point is that I would not wish to suggest that ‘education’ is the answer to all the problems of disadvantaged children. My own view is that carefully integrated programmes must be developed, programmes which will consider ways of improving nutrition, sanitation, water supply and, obviously enough, of minimizing poverty. Education is both an end in itself and a major strategy for attaining other ends. To improve health or nutrition, for example, implies programmes to

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educate the communities and families. But that is another set of issues; our present concern is with the role of education in improving the quality of life of disadvantaged children.

'Disadvantage' implies a lack, a negative quality or attribute of some kind as a result of which children are unable to achieve their greatest potential, either in terms of their own individual development or in relation to meeting the needs of their own societies. This carries the connotation of relativity: children are 'disadvantaged' in comparison with other children, either in the same society or culture or, on some kind of absolute scale, with all children everywhere. In this sense the concept is linked with that of 'equality of opportunity'. The disadvantaged child is less likely to have equal opportunity of access to educational facilities. In addition, or alternatively, he or she may also be less likely to be able to make full use of those facilities even when access is available. As a direct consequence, disadvantage becomes cumulative.

The assumption is that because of their disadvantage, whatever that may mean, such children are less likely to achieve their innate potential in general. There is often a further assumption that the factors which are thought to contribute to 'disadvantage' have universal meanings irrespective of the nature of the culture, the society and the environment in which the child grows up. This may well be challenged. A background which leads to 'disadvantage' for certain purposes may be perfectly adequate and indeed facilitating in other circumstances. To take a specific case, the cognitive skills of many children living in the developing countries are frequently 'inadequate' (or rather, inappropriate) for understanding and manipulating many of the concepts normally used in a standard Western school curriculum. On the other hand, they are more than adequate—indeed they are essential—to enable the children to live in, work with and manipulate the environment in which they grow up. These questions must always be asked: In what circumstances, are they inadequate? In relation to whom are they disadvantaged? What are the purposes in doing this?

The notion that social and cultural backgrounds may in themselves be impediments to optimal individual development is also open to question. This view has been almost by definition the standard assumption of all 'compensatory' or 'preventive' early childhood education programmes. It was the mainspring of 'Head Start' (Zigler and Valentine 1979), from which a great deal of subsequent planning for early childhood education has been derived. It has been challenged, particularly by scholars such as Labov (1970), Ginsburg (1972) who have argued, with solid research data, that even in 'advanced' industrialized societies, children are able to fulfil their innate potential within their own specific cultures or sub-cultures. The fact that a child is unable to cope with a school situation, dominated by a structure, a curriculum and a language 'foreign' to him, does not mean that he has not reached or cannot reach a high level of performance within his/her own natural environment and background. Nonetheless, most discussions of disadvantage have accepted the proposition that 'inadequate backgrounds' lead to disadvantage or deficit or both, which can be prevented or compensated for by appropriate action. It is fair to say

that international agencies, in general, have also accepted the philosophy of these assumptions.

There is therefore some need to clarify what is meant by words like 'disadvantage', 'deficit', 'deprivation', and 'difference', words which are used frequently in discussions and which have guided a great deal of the work of international agencies and national governments.

In general the definitions have been couched essentially in pragmatic and educational terms, related on the one hand to ideas about the needs of children and youth, and on the other to societal goals within the individual community and the groups in which any programme is working. A great deal of the argument about the meanings of these words in professional as well as lay literature have been semantic: many of them have confused causes with effects, and this has in turn influenced the ways efforts have been directed to prevent or overcome the consequences, if any, of the four 'Ds' difference, deprivation, deficit and disadvantage. Robinson discusses the semantic issues clearly and persuasively, arguing "that a little more consideration to the meanings of 'difference' and 'deficit' might have saved everyone some trouble" (Robinson 1975).

Much of the confusion has arisen because issues have been presented in social or educational terms, whereas many of the theoretical arguments have been posited and the experiments carried out by linguists, sociologists and psychologists who have not, for the most part, been concerned with the practical implications, let alone the implementation of their theories and laboratory experiments. Nor, for that matter, has there been adequate feedback to psychologists, sociologists and linguists from the field situations, in particular, there has been a paucity of good comparative data.

An operational definition of 'disadvantage', in so far as it affects formal education, was posed most precisely for Unesco by Passow (1970):

A child is at a disadvantage if because of social or cultural characteristics (e.g. social class, race, ethnic origin, poverty, sex, geographical location, etc.) he comes into the school system with knowledge, skills and attitudes which impede learning and contribute to accumulative academic deficit. The disadvantage may persist throughout school life and contribute to restricting later economic and social opportunities (p. 16).

Passow also defines 'deprived':

A child is deprived if for social, political or cultural reasons, the normal facilities of the school system are available to him only in a restricted form (p. 16).

That is, 'deprivation' occurs when the child is unable to attend the ordinary school system; 'disadvantage' is present when he or she goes to school but, for one social reason or another, is unable to profit properly from what it has to offer.

In this view, deprivation is seen as a complement of disadvantage, which is interpreted as essentially the consequence of difference or 'cultural deficiency'. The effects are usually analysed, at least initially, in terms of the formal school system. By inference, if they are to be mitigated, it must be through some form of

compensation related to the demands of the school. This philosophy underlies much of the activity in early childhood education in the 1960s and the 1970s.

Such an analysis is couched essentially in socioeconomic or, at best, institutional terms, and reflects the general trend of a policy which was seldom concerned with children as individuals. Solutions to the problems of the 'disadvantaged' were seen as essentially economic, in the provision of more (and better) schools, teachers, materials and facilities generally. The model was essentially that of the economic planner. To some extent, such an approach may have been inevitable, given the climate of thinking in the 1960s and 1970s. The numbers of disadvantaged children, in terms of non-access to education alone, particularly in the Third World, have been so vast that mass planning solutions were sought—forgetting that the 'masses' were, and are, masses of children with unique and individual abilities, needs and potentials.

Even in highly industrialized societies, whether in the East or the West, with first-rate schools, well-educated and well-trained teachers, excellent material facilities and so on, there are many educationally disadvantaged children. In the Third World nations, concentrations of the high numbers of economically and socially disadvantaged tend to obscure the fact that millions of them are also psychologically, physically or culturally disadvantaged even in comparison with other children in the same societies. Such children are doubly disadvantaged. Furthermore, there is evidence that provision of better schools, teachers, equipment and so forth on a general economic-educational planning formula, may exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the comparative disadvantage of such children. Planning, unless it takes into account individual differences, may widen rather than narrow the gap dividing the 'advantaged' and the 'disadvantaged', within as well as between societies.

It is for this reason that this paper recommends the development of plans and programmes with the child as well as the society as their focus. It is not, must be emphasized, an 'either or' case. It is possible to design comprehensive programmes which aim to cater for all disadvantaged children and not only, for example, the able but poor.

It is possible to argue further that emphasis should not be placed solely upon the school system but should also be on the relationships of the child with his family and of that family with the community, and on the ways in which those relationships are reflected in the child's, the family's and the community's contact with the school. Indeed this follows directly from the seventh Principle of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child—'the best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his/her education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents.' If there is a fundamental difference between the aims and methods of child rearing in the home and those of the school, then there is inevitable conflict and it is the child who suffers. This has not always been properly realized, particularly by the schools. If parents, almost always because of inadequate knowledge rather than neglect, are pursuing methods of child rearing which may not be in the best interests of the child, then the answer lies in the careful, planned parent education and not in the introduction of school-based programmes

directed at children only. To quote a little known report by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, there has been

a surprisingly belated recognition, across international differences, that there should be a fundamentally *complementary* relationship between care and education provided in the home and provided institutionally - in a wide variety of ways - by the community or state. The living link in that complementary relationship is the parents.

(CERI: OECD 1977)

A recognition of this distinction leads to a consideration of the meaning of 'difference' compared with 'disadvantage'. The concept of 'difference' is somewhat elusive and has been used, as shown by Robinson, in a variety of senses. I would argue that the term is relative and at the same time specific in that it should always refer to a definable set of variables or characteristics. We are all 'different' one from another in some sense, but the 'difference' begins to be important for educational purpose when it refers to characteristics which have salience for a particular set of objectives in a particular set of circumstances imposed by some institution or authority like a school system. In this interpretation a child is 'different' from others when he or she has definable and observable characteristics other than those assumed or required by the system. For example, a child is 'different' if he speaks Hindi or Polish when English is the required language of the school. More subtly, a child is 'different' when he or she uses a restricted language code in Bernstein's formulation (Bernstein 1971). This distinction is of great significance in multicultural, multilingual societies where the language (or dialect, even) of the home is not that of the school. There is accumulating evidence that the problem is not only one of vocabulary or structure, but one of the ways in which specific concepts are expressed or understood.

To go further would lead into the whole question of attitudinal theory and prejudice. It is assuredly to be condemned when there is discrimination because of 'difference'—skin-colour or ethnic origin or religious affiliation—especially when such discrimination leads to 'deprivation' or 'disadvantage' in the senses discussed above. However, *for present purposes* we are not concerned with 'difference' in the absolute sense, but essentially with 'difference' which is demonstrably and objectively relevant to the cognitive demands of the school system.

This approach is in line with that of Cole and Bruner (1972), whose basic data are comparative and who tend to underplay the notion of 'disadvantage' and to focus on that of 'difference', arguing that in comparative cultural or sub-cultural terms, *cultural deprivation* represents a special case of *cultural difference* which arises when a person is asked to perform in a manner inconsistent with his past 'cultural experience' in the family, the social class, and the community. The school system represents one setting in which such inconsistent performance is frequently demanded and the techniques for overcoming the problem are seen as being essentially those of helping the child to learn to perform in ways which are different from or are extensions of the pattern with which he is familiar. That is, the solution is not a compensatory one: it is one of changing the methods of instruction and of

learning, allied to work with parents and community in order to develop new ways of meeting the needs and problems of the data.

On the other hand Ginsburg (1972), leaning heavily on Labov's work on the linguistic and cognitive skills of ghetto children, writes of the 'myth of the deprived child' and defines 'disadvantage' in terms of the school system as it operates. No child is disadvantaged or deprived in himself or herself; the syndrome is imposed and reinforced by the system and the remedy lies in reform of the school or the social system, not in action directed at children per se nor in change of their backgrounds and environments. Such an argument, while philosophically attractive, is difficult to accept at the immediate working level.

For example, to claim that 'poor' children—children born into the sub-cultures of poverty—in any country are not 'disadvantaged' is unacceptable. They lack access, not only to the goods and services available to others in the society as a whole, but also to many of the skills and much of the knowledge on which access depends. Their survival rates at birth are much lower; probabilities of serious illness both before and after parturition are much higher; when access to school is limited, such children tend to be excluded; when they are admitted, their school attendance patterns and classroom performance are demonstrably worse; their employment prospects, in terms of level of job as well as continuity within job, are abysmally less... and so on. They are poor in every way and are likely to remain so, as in turn are their children. Disadvantaged children, in this sense, are the products of disadvantaged parents. And in this sense, of necessity in the short run at least, the Ginsburg-Labov position is thoroughly indefensible. The problem for most countries of immediacy—what can be done *now* in society for children excluded from school, for those for whom there are no schools, and for those who are unable to profit from school even when admitted?

The argument about deficit and difference in this social context is a dangerous smoke screen, especially when it is further obfuscated by highly esoteric discussions about language, or worse, about I.Q. as measured by standardized western type of 'intelligence' tests. Labov (1970) is perfectly right—and much to be praised—for pointing out the weaknesses in the psycho-linguistic/socio-linguistic compensation thesis, but he is almost as assuredly wrong in claiming that children from poor minority sub-cultures are not linguistically disadvantaged in almost any context other than that of their own minority sub-culture. It is true from his own evidence and from that of social anthropologists, linguists, psychologists and educators working in non-Western societies, that such children, when operating within the confines of their own-sub-cultures are just as efficient in the use of language in logical argument and cognitive skills generally as are their more socially and economically fortunate compatriots, *but*—and it is an important 'but'—they remain disadvantaged where it all too often matters in the social, economic and educational market places of the wider world whose advantages they rightly seek. The probability of their achieving the greatest possible realization of their innate potential on the wider scale is demonstrably lower.

Whether this should be so is another issue since the question then becomes one of social choice: whether to change the sub-culture i.e. to prevent the occurrence of

conditions conducive to disadvantage; or to provide links between customary community performance in Cole's and Bruner's sense, and that expected in the wider context i.e. to provide appropriate school opportunities; or to change the market place i.e. to change the school or the society. These are choices for each society to make on its own terms.

It is doubtful that Cole and Bruner go far enough in arguing the need to take the setting into account when looking at differences and designing programmes appropriate to them. Part of that setting is language. It is probably true, strictly speaking, that all languages are functionally equal but this is only useful, in the practical as against the theoretical sense, if we add a phrase like 'within the context of their own cultures'. It is easy to show, as Whorf wrote long ago, that:

Western culture has made, through language, a provisional analysis of reality and, without correctives, holds resolutely to that analysis as final. The only correctives lie in all those other tongues which, by eons of independent evolution, have arrived at different but equally logical provisional analyses (Whorf 1956, p. 244).

Bridgman's brilliant article in *Daedalus* in 1958 makes much the same statement in different words.

He writes:

It begins to look as though formal logic, as we know it, is an attribute of the group of Indo-European languages with certain grammatical features (Bridgman 1958, p. 88).

The problem is that it is precisely the Western reality described by Whorf and the Western logic analysed by Bridgman which underlie most modern science and technology and which therefore dominate most economic systems and hence school systems, founded as they are on European (West and East alike) or United States models. Even within the industrialized societies there is a dominant mode—that of the middle class, and 'poor' children are disadvantaged in relation to it. To use a different metaphor, the rules of the school and societal games are usually couched in specific language terms, and unless children learn the rules they are unable to play or at best play indifferently well—let alone win. According to Cole and Bruner (1972), the teacher should stop labouring under the impression that he must create new intellectual structures, he should start concentrating on how to get the child to transfer skills he already possesses to the task in hand.

The difficulty is that in some cultural contexts, relevant transferable skills may not exist or, more commonly, linguistic structures may not be appropriate, especially when school instruction is not in the mother-tongue or mother-dialect. For example, among the Melpa people of the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea, complex linguistic hierarchies of classification do not exist (Kelly and Philp 1975). The languages are functionally appropriate entirely to the society and the culture, but are not functionally appropriate to the learning situation of the school. 'Transferring' in the Cole and Bruner sense is extraordinarily difficult. The reverse is true of English which is opposite to the imposed school curriculum but has major limitations in the day-to-day context of Western Highlands' culture. It is no answer to say 'change the school' when the people themselves are ardently seeking the

rewards which (rightly or wrongly) they perceive the existing school culture is bringing. If there is some conflict between language and concepts to be learned, then the curriculum and teaching methods must be carefully designed to overcome any problems which arise.

This is far from denying the right of every child to be taught in his or her own language; it is rather to stress the view that great care must be taken to ensure that concepts and ideas are properly introduced when they are not endogenous to the particular culture.

At the project level, this again implies a relativist approach. A target group is one whose members are less likely to attain or achieve their potential than the majority within the same society. Such groups are difficult to define precisely except in terms of any given project: the definition becomes operational.

Inevitably such a relativist position can lead to charges of inconsistency or even inequity if comparisons are made across or between countries rather than within them. On any absolute scale, this impeachment is unanswerable if one accepts the view that all children everywhere are entitled to fundamental human rights and to equality of opportunity in all spheres of life. To this pragmatic answer may be given that within any one society it is the relative position which becomes important in the short term because of limited resources and because all concomitants of 'disadvantage' must be opposed wherever and whenever they are found. In the long term—which should be as limited as possible—the world objective must be to prevent or to minimize all 'disadvantage' everywhere. Every child in every country should and eventually must be equally advantaged, but this will take time for social, cultural as well as economic reasons. Immediate programmes and projects will accordingly be directed to the alleviation of 'disadvantage' within particular systems. This does not, obviously enough, exclude regional and international policies and plans.

There remains the problem of the possible stigma which may be attached by defining any particular group as being 'disadvantaged', leading, as it may, to charges of 'cultural intolerance'. That is, there is a question of value judgements implicit in the designation of any one child or group of children as being 'disadvantaged'. The answers can only be in relative terms within any one society or in absolute terms when measured against the 'Rights of the Child'. If those rights are infringed or impaired for any one child, then that child, by definition, is 'disadvantaged'; and the stigma attaches to the international community or to the local society and not to the child.

In theory at least, this definition has been to some extent accepted and many projects have been concerned with educational programmes directed at the children and to a growing extent the parents and communities. The intent has been essentially to increase the probability of children's reaching their innate potential, however this has been defined. That all children in many countries are *disadvantaged* is obvious; but that many of them are also, in definable ways, *different* from the general run of children within their own societies is also amply demonstrated. For present purposes it is irrelevant whether this 'disadvantage' and 'difference' results from 'cultural deprivation' or some kind of deficit in their family backgrounds. The children are

demonstrably disadvantaged and it is with this fact that we as educators should be concerned.

The ‘different’ child *may* as a consequence be ‘disadvantaged’ according to Passow’s definition but the two terms are not identical. Furthermore, there is not necessarily the same pejorative sense about ‘different’ as there often is about ‘disadvantaged’.

Similarly, ‘deficit’ carries some negative connotation in that it implies a lack of some essential, highly valued or important characteristic, but this concept, too, must be looked at in relative terms in the present context. The child is educationally ‘deficient’ when there is a lack or inadequacy in some characteristic relevant to the demands of the school situation. In this usage the child who is ‘different’ or, for other reasons ‘deficient’, in relation to the school and its demands may be ‘disadvantaged’ as a direct consequence.

This analysis is not merely semantic play, for each concept has quite specific implications for the educational programme related to it.

This is not the place to discuss arguments such as those of Keddie and others (1973) on the ‘myth of deprivation’ (with which I have much sympathy). The point is that for an international organization or for a school system operating within a particular society, ‘disadvantage’ is a real issue. There are many children who for a variety of social reasons are hindered or prevented from attaining their full potential, whether intellectual, social or physical, within their own countries. The long term solutions may well lie in changing the society and the school, but nations and their school systems are faced with finding short—or medium-term solutions for children who are at school today or who are likely to be at school in the very near future. What then can be done to eliminate or minimize the negative effects of ‘disadvantage’,* ‘deficiency’, ‘difference’ or ‘deprivation’?

Theoretically, there are at least three fundamental strategies, each with variants:

1. to change the child,
2. to change the school, or
3. to change the society.

1. To change the child

This has a number of possible variants. Most common is the assertion that we should provide the child with ‘missing’ or ‘important’ knowledge, skills or attitudes to enable him or her to cope successfully with the demands of school *as it is*. This solution assumes ‘disadvantage’ and ‘deficiency’ *vis a vis* the school. This is the traditional ‘compensation’ solution. It implies intervention. It also assumes that the schools, including their curricula and teaching methods, are fundamentally appropriate to the needs and potential of the vast majority of children and to the needs and demands of the society. The ‘weakness’ is in the child and special programmes should be provided to ensure that he or she is provided with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to cope effectively with the school system. Most, but not all, programmes of this kind directed specifically at children have been at the Preschool level. They have accepted Benjamin Bloom’s hypothesis that:

... change in many human characteristics becomes more and more difficult as the characteristics become more fully developed. Although there may be some change in a particular characteristic at almost any point in the individual's history, the amount of change possible is a declining function as a characteristic becomes increasingly stabilized.

(Bloom 1964, pp. 299–300)

Bloom may well be right but on the evidence most, if not all, compensatory programmes have been less than successful when they have been designed specifically to prepare the child, as such, for the academic aspects of school as it is. Young children are a good deal more than prospective pupils and schools are concerned, either explicitly or implicitly, with a great deal more than cognitive performance.

Less well known are the projects which, while still concentrating on the child, as distinct from the child-in-a-family or the child-in-the-community, have endeavoured to change 'the whole child'—physically and emotionally as well as intellectually. Such solutions imply socialization apart from the family or the community, i.e. they are institutional in that children are taken out of their natural setting and reared in a thoroughly controlled environment. Programmes of this kind are now rare, but were once much in vogue. They too, in general terms, may be said to have failed to meet their objectives. Children need families if they are to develop as whole people.

More recent trends have been to develop projects which focus on the child within the family or community setting. The target remains in the child: little is deliberately attempted to change the family or the community in themselves, except in so far as treatment of the child is concerned. Programmes of this character have been most successful for children whose disadvantage is physical, mental or emotional handicap. They have also met with some limited success in projects like 'Home Start' or 'Home Base' where the objectives are similar to those discussed above: to prepare the child for the school-as-it-is. They have been less successful when applied more generally.

In general the evidence would appear to support the view that programmes, which attempt to change children in themselves, without at the same time changing the school, the family and the community are doomed to failure.

2. To change the school

The proposition is that by making alterations or adjustments to the school and its offerings, the disadvantaged child will be better able to profit from its offerings. There are several variants of this solution varying from the ameliorative or palliative to total restructuring. However, we may briefly discuss three common possibilities.

The school may be provided with 'additional' or 'different' equipment and materials assumed to be compensatory. In effect, the school becomes a kind of intellectual Father Christmas. This strategy stems obviously enough from the basic assumption that 'disadvantage' is in its essence a function of poverty. The opening paragraph of the definitive account of 'Head Start' makes this plain:

Head Start emerged as a social action programme at a time in history when social and political forces, as well as intellectual traditions in the social sciences, had come to focus on the problem of poverty. The story of Head Start's development is an intricate one because all of these threads run through it: the social and political struggles of the Civil Rights era and the War on the Poverty, revival of scientific interest in the realm of environment and human development, and the design of education—and intervention efforts for children of the disadvantaged.

(Zigler and Valentine 1979, p. 3)

The prescription was apparent: both 'disadvantaged' and 'different' imply a lack. Poverty implies inability to obtain or buy materials—books as well as food, learning as well as nutrition. The school by providing both would complement and hence compensate. The assumption that the disadvantage lay essentially in material resources is reasonable only if seen in the context of poverty and its prevention or amelioration. The fundamental weakness of the somewhat 'naïve optimism' of the view that education was, or could be, an antidote to poverty can readily be argued, but the proposition gained considerable credibility in the context of President Johnson's 'War against Want' and his stirring apothegm 'Poverty has many roots, but its tap root is ignorance' (Johnson 1965). If the gross oversimplification of this position is accepted for the moment, it is certainly easy to show that in highly industrialized societies, like those of the United States, Europe or Australia, education can and often does provide one means of escape from the poverty for some children. In the developing world, however, the argument lacks even this validity. The causes of poverty and their effects are wider and deeper—and so must be the remedies but 'Head Start' and its derivative have had a major influence throughout the world on programmes for the disadvantaged.

Furthermore, not all 'disadvantage', as defined, is a consequence of poverty: it may be a product of social class, ethnic affiliation, physical or mental handicap, language, child rearing practices, cultural values and beliefs, community attitudes, isolation—the list could be extended almost indefinitely. Many of these variables are often associated with poverty, some causally, some more or less incidentally, and some have no relationship whatsoever. That is, to equate poverty and disadvantage may be, and often is, to fail to identify a number of target groups of relevance and significance. To put the matter epigrammatically: most children of poverty are disadvantaged, but not all disadvantaged children are poor. The Father Christmas model, despite its high principles has not worked particularly well.

The second means of 'changing the school' has placed emphasis on curriculum and teaching methods for *individual children*. There is no attempt to identify *groups* of 'disadvantaged' youngsters. Instead, each child is treated as an individual: specific 'disadvantage' is diagnosed and identified, and appropriate 'remedial' techniques are devised. The objective in this philosophy is to teach and develop individual knowledge, skills and attitudes which will enable the 'disadvantaged' child, in the broad sense of the word, to 'fit into the normal classroom'. This approach is obviously enough related to notions about changing the child, but it goes somewhat further in its assumption that the school must accommodate to the needs and potential of the child as an individual rather than the other way round.

Programmes based on this philosophy have characteristically, although not exclusively, been developed for the child disadvantaged by physical, mental or emotional handicap. When the programmes have also involved parents as active participants such efforts have often been highly successful. They are expensive and require well-trained, sensitive teachers.

More common, superficially more attractive but potentially more dangerous, is a strategy aimed at providing alternative curricula and teaching methods for groups of children, identified and classified as 'disadvantaged' because of their membership of those groups. It is in terms of such procedures that the distinction among the terms 'difference', 'deficiency' and 'deprivation' becomes highly significant. It is essentially against such a distinction, in fact, that Labov (1970) in one context and Freire (1972) in another, are rightly most polemic. The danger is plainly that if children who are 'different' in terms of language, ethnic origin, location or whatever are defined as 'disadvantaged' or 'deficient' because of that difference and are in consequence presented with school experiences which reinforce and exaggerate the effects of that disadvantage, then the result is to reduce rather than enhance potential. The flagrant example is 'apartheid' schooling where some groups of black children are exposed to a diluted, modified, broken down curriculum because they are 'not yet at a proper stage of development' to be able to cope with the standard system. As a result, difference and hence disadvantage become institutionalized. Cases of this kind are easy to identify and to be condemned. Less apparent are the instances in which curriculum and method are 'specially designed to meet the specific needs' of particular groups—migrants, itinerants, linguistic minorities, the very poor—and the 'specific provision' all too often adds to the disadvantage.

And yet, given the existence of groups of children who are demonstrably disadvantaged in educational terms, and given also a strategy which is school-related, specific curriculum and methods must be designed and taught, the fundamental difference must be one of objectives: both general and specific. It is possible to argue that achievement of human potential can be enhanced in many ways and that an education system or a school should be concerned with determining and developing means of ensuring that all children have a reasonable probability of attaining their own intrinsic capacity. This implies a highly flexible system whose goals and means are carefully defined in terms of *all* children.

And herein lies the rub. And strategy which focuses on either the child or the school as such as a means of preventing diminishing or compensating for disadvantage inevitably accepts the proposition that fundamentally the school system is an appropriate one for the needs and demands of the society as a whole. This view is implicit in Passow's definitions of 'disadvantage' and 'deprivation' which were quoted above. School systems are thought to be good: the problem is to ensure that all children have equal probability of access to them and once there, they have a probability of learning from them that is consistent with innate potential. There can be improvement within the system—in greater access and teaching skills; in curriculum and methods; in physical and material facilities, but the system itself is assumed to be fundamentally sound.

Moreover, such a view is almost inevitable for any external agency, whether it be the World Bank, Unesco, bilateral aid agencies or foundations, which accept the concept of national sovereignty. Yet few educators would subscribe to the thesis that all educational systems are fundamentally good.

3. To change the society

The third strategy of changing the society may also take several forms.

At one level, the simplest, it may consist of extending the concepts of disadvantage, difference, deprivation and deficiency from the individual to the family and the community. 'Disadvantaged children come in the main from disadvantaged families living in disadvantaged communities.' So runs the argument. And just as the assumption is made that the schools in general meet the needs of the society as a whole, and 'disadvantaged' children should be given opportunities to profit equitably from them, so it is presumed that, in general, society as a whole meets the needs of its members and that 'disadvantaged' groups in the generic sense, should be given the proper opportunities. This is all that is necessary to ensure equality for the realization of potential.

Arguments along these lines lead to programme within families and communities designed to produce changes in behaviour which will increase the probability that children will be better able to profit from the schools. This is to impose something akin to a compensatory model on communities and families.

It is taken for granted that there is some kind of core or modal set of behaviours characteristic of the society, and that groups which do not display these behaviours are in some way 'disadvantaged'.

The second model for changing the society as a target for intervention programmes, is more closely related to the living patterns and values of the 'disadvantaged' groups themselves. In this formulation efforts are made to identify the relevant characteristics of the groups, including the social aspirations and skills of its members and then to develop educational programmes, both formal and informal, consonant with these aspirations and abilities.

There are two variants of this model—one positive and the other negative. When decisions about the nature of the educational programme are made by the members of the community itself; when they are in Unesco terms, 'endogenously determined', then the consequences may be said to be positive. External aid, whether national or international, is used to support the wishes and plans of the family or of the community. The results are negative when the investigation and the consequent decisions are made by some external body and imposed on a community as being 'best for the people at the present stage of their development'. Such solutions or proposals are essentially of an apartheid kind.

Logically, a third possible 'change the society' strategy for prevention or alleviation of disadvantage is drastic social change. Every major revolution in modern times—French, Russian, Chinese—and most successful independence movements have been accompanied with greater or lesser success by a thorough restructuring of the education system as one means of providing greater, more equal opportunity for all children.

It follows that the major concern must be, and can only be, with the *improvement of the quality of educational services for disadvantaged children*. This does not mean *only* improvement of school systems: it *also* forcibly implies programme for and within families and communities in non-formal situations.

It also implies development of programme with curriculum, methods and techniques specifically designed to meet the needs of the particular children, whatever the nature of their disadvantage. This throws a great deal of responsibility on the professional knowledge and skills of teachers. It demands a detailed analysis of the unique situation and the provision of resources to meet each situation—difficult and expensive though this may be. If democracy means anything, it means equality of opportunity in both the senses in which I have used the phrase—equality of opportunity of access to education facilities and equality of opportunity to take maximum benefit from those facilities.

In more specific terms, what all this means for the classroom teacher depends on a series of factors:

- the general strategy, i.e. whether the target is to be the child, the school or the society
- the nature of the disadvantage
- the teaching-learning model adopted
- the resources and facilities available, both human and material—including the education, training and skills of teachers themselves.

Enough has been said about the first two of these—the strategy and the differential nature of disadvantage—but something should be added on the more specific issues of instructional models and resources.

For the sake of ease of presentation and discussion, I shall try to speak in terms of formal school situations, but the principles apply with equal strength to non-formal education and to programmes focused on individual children or on communities. That is, although what I have to say now will concentrate fairly specifically on classrooms and on teachers and children within those classrooms, I would insist that on all the evidence available to us a purely classroom-based programme for disadvantaged children is, at best, ineffective in meeting even its own objectives, let alone those of the children and their families. Home influences far outweigh those of the school. It follows that the help, cooperation and understanding of parents are vital, if any programme for disadvantaged children is to succeed at any level. Apart from the right of parents to know what is happening to their children, they are more likely to support the school if they are kept carefully aware of its activities, aims and methods. In addition, there should be consistency in teaching-learning methods and this may well mean working actively with parents as part of the curriculum itself.

That said—what types of teaching-learning models are available and what are their implications? Essentially there are two major groups: those based on psychological theories about the nature of child development and the learning process and those based on educational theory and practice. Each has its adherents and disciples and there is no hard research evidence to suggest that one is any better or

worse than another. What we do not know is that no model is effective in meeting objectives unless the teachers concerned are clearly aware of what they are doing. Many of the so-called 'failures' of 'Head Start', for example, were really failures of the schools to ensure that the teachers were properly educated and trained not only in the methods and techniques appropriate to the specific curriculum, but also in the basic ideas behind that curriculum. To take an important if obvious example, a number of classroom programmes, supposedly based on Piagetian theory, have been totally ineffective because the teachers have had little or no idea of the basic principles and have done no more than use the materials and equipment in ways learned in relation to quite other and different principles. This is not to criticize the teachers: it is to blame those responsible for introducing the new programmes without adequate thought about the need for in-service teacher education.

(a) Programmes derived from 'psychological' theory are of two basic types:

- i. Those based on theories about child development, either in cognitive terms (e.g. programmes derived from the work of scholars Piaget or Bruner), or in socio-emotional terms (e.g. programmes derived from the work of psychoanalysts), or in eclectic terms (e.g. those which purpose to enhance all-round development). In general terms, such theories have a genetic base, in that they assume that there is an inbuilt pattern or sequence of development which may be facilitated or impeded by environmental factors, including the school.

The great majority of developmental programmes for socially or economically disadvantaged children have been cognitively based, partly because schools are more concerned with cognitive processes than with other aspects of human development but also because of the fashion for Piaget and his followers or derivatives which dominates current thinking and writing on child development as related to education.

- ii. Programmes based on learning theory of one type or another. Broadly speaking these may be categorized as 'environmental' type programmes, in that they assume that the educator's task is to set up carefully planned situations in which the child, through appropriate reinforcement, is able to learn the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by the curriculum. Such programmes are frequently designated 'behaviourist', although many modern theorists such as those concerned with direct instruction would reject the term.

It may be argued that behaviourist programmes, by their nature, accept the 'compensation' hypothesis for education of the disadvantaged. This is not necessarily true, but it would seem clear that those who have relied on compensatory education for disadvantaged children have probably had a greater measure of success with such programmes than with those based on cognitive theory.

(b) Programmes derived from educational theory and experience may also be conveniently divided into two groups:

- i. Those which are based on the view that there are readily definable sets of knowledge, skills and attitudes which all children must acquire to some reasonable level of competence. The designers of programmes of this type therefore develop curricula and methods for the education of disadvantaged children to ensure that they attain the appropriate levels of such competence. These programmes, logically enough are usually termed 'competency based'.
- ii. Those based on the traditional early childhood education theories and practices of Froebel, Montessori, Pestalozzi and others. These are related to the 'development' theories mentioned above, but there is an important difference in that they are founded on notions about the 'nature' of the child and the aims of education as distinct from ideas and theories about the way in which children develop as a consequence of the interplay of genetic and environmental factors.

It must be emphasized that very few, if any, programmes are 'pure', in the sense of being based entirely on one theoretical approach. Most are in some measure eclectic, some almost completely so, but it must also be emphasized that the implications for classroom practice are quite different for each approach. The methods and techniques appropriate for a compensatory programme based on language competency are quite different from those produced for a developmental programme whose objectives are also related to language skills. In both cases, however, teachers must be able to identify clearly the nature of the disadvantage and develop a programme which will alleviate or eliminate its effects. The difference comes in the curriculum and methods. It is apparent that special programmes for disadvantaged children demand a high degree of professional dedication, knowledge and skill, including a readiness to learn new ways of teaching appropriate to the nature of the disadvantage and the educational model chosen. From the available evidence it may reasonably be asserted that the precise form and content of the curriculum is of lesser significance than the child-teacher relationships (Bernard van Leer Foundation 1984) provided the form and content are carefully developed in a consistent manner based on a well-formulated and well-understood set of basic principles. At the early childhood and primary levels at least, there are few, if any, data to suggest that any one theory is better than any other—provided it is consistently developed and used.

The fourth set of factors to be taken into account within classrooms relates to the nature and availability of resources. Little need be said about material resources other than to emphasize the obvious; no curriculum should imply the use of equipment which is not available or whose use is beyond the skill of the teacher or the understanding of the child. This seems obvious, but most classroom teachers are only too aware of the amount of equipment, including textbooks, which has been sent to them because it 'looks good' or 'worked well' in the United States or Britain (or somewhere else with a different set of problems and a different curriculum) and is quite unsuitable—and often unusable—in the new context.

Of more immediate concern is the overwhelming need to develop programmes which take into careful account the available human resources—usually teachers—and the knowledge and skill of those teachers. It is often counter-productive and pointless to introduce programmes based on unfamiliar principles which involve new curricula, methods and techniques without ensuring that the teachers are properly prepared. All too often there has been an assumption, he or she is thoroughly competent to teach anything in any required way. It is an assumption we would totally reject in other professions. Before a doctor, for example, begins to use an entirely new method of surgery we rightly expect a rigorous period of re-education, but we are prone to introduce new methods of intellectual surgery without making similar provisions. Teachers are capable of radical change in their methods and techniques of the kind essential for work with disadvantaged children, but they must be given the opportunity to learn the new methods in systematic ways. It is false economy to pretend otherwise.

To summarize, I have tried to suggest that children are important in themselves and that programmes for disadvantaged children, particularly educational programmes, should be developed for them and not specifically for institutions. I have argued that education is a fundamental strategy for the elimination and alleviation of disadvantage, but that the particular methods to be used will depend on the nature of the particular society—there are no universal panacea. Teachers have a critical role to play and must receive the education and training appropriate to each specific programme. I have also urged the view that school-based programmes in themselves are inadequate: parents must be actively and meaningfully involved.

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Author Biography

Professor Hugh Philp was Emeritus Professor of Macquarie University. He trained as a teacher at Sydney Teachers College. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Psychology at the University of Sydney and later the degree of Master of Arts with First Class Honours in Psychology. On a Fulbright Fellowship he obtained the degrees of Master of Arts in Social Psychology at Harvard University. He was appointed to Macquarie University's Foundation Chair of Education in 1967. His prior appointments included the Director of the UNESCO Institute of Child Study in Thailand which led to the headship of the UNESCO Division of Studies and Research in Paris. As first Head of School, he established and developed a School of education with a strong comparative approach, focusing on the significant educational issues and contemporary matters which confronted world education. At the time of his retirement in 1983 the Macquarie University Council conferred on Hugh Philp the title of Emeritus Professor. He was described as an international man whose reputation and study in the world of education brought recognition and credit to the School of Education and to the University. After his retirement he continued his service to the University as a member of the Council. Emeritus Professor Hugh Philp passed away on 30 July 2001 at the age of 82.

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