

The youngster would never show a good report card to the gang for fear of derision, nor would he receive proper approval from his parents to compensate for his friends' ridicule. Thus we see how the school's influence over the lower-class child is rendered ineffectual by his socialization experiences at home.

Another factor worthy of mention is the nature of the subject material covered in the elementary grades. As we know, the modern school still centers its curriculum upon such familiar areas as Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Number Concepts, and some forms of Creative Expression. Basically, this program carries a high verbal content, and while educators strive to divert emphasis to other fundamentals, the fact remains that a student's scholastic proficiency depends a great deal on his facility for reading comprehension, writing, fluent speech, and the like. If he is able to manipulate the language tools skillfully, he has an excellent advantage in achieving good ratings in his classwork. If, on the other hand, he finds little interest or purpose in mastering these essentials, he labors under a decided handicap, despite whatever other abilities in problem solving and creative talents he may possess.

Here, too, the middle-class milieu equips the child for easier success. Quite apart from the assorted pressures and aids he receives at home to study his school texts, he is motivated by the examples set by his parents through their own habits of reading books, magazines, and newspapers. Reading in the middle-class home is a common practice for any number of reasons, pleasurable, practical, or otherwise. Especially among semi-professional and professional people, whose work demands it, there is a healthy respect built for the spoken and printed word, and this attitude seeps down to the children at an early age. By the time the youngster enters the first grade, he has begun to familiarize himself with the rich, middle-class vocabulary that is so highly approved by the middle-class teacher, and is prepared to see some wisdom in learning to decipher written symbols. His recognition of the value of language mastery helps stimulate him for the school's reading-readiness program.

In this sense he enjoys an initial superiority over the lower-class child whose home environment lays comparatively little stress on linguistic power. There is no prestige attached to refined speech and reading habits in the slum culture where these skills are of little functional utility in solving the daily problems of family living. Nor do language abilities play much role in the low-income, unskilled laborer's endeavors to provide adequately for his family. Other mental talents are called into play when squalor, overcrowdedness, and starvation are problems faced each day. Evidently, such talents attract few rewards in the classroom.

Considering, therefore, that school society absorbs its population from separate social worlds, each having its unique impact on the learning process, there emerges the basic problem of flexing our educational services to satisfy equally the needs of such diverse cultural groups. Fortunately, an awareness of this problem is already indicated by some of the questions educators are raising about our traditionally accepted school practices. Some are beginning to wonder, for example, "whether the expected behaviors [in the classroom] are the most desirable kinds of behaviors to encourage in children. Punctuality, neatness, docility, and work-mindedness are all well and good, but missing are expectations that psychologists and philosophers might consider more fundamental such as the development of intellectual curiosity, confidence in one's self, ability to get along well with other children, respect for individuals regardless of race, color or creed, developing insight into one's self and others, training into use of scientific method for solving problems, development of moral courage and moral integrity."³ In other words, is it not true that in concentrating on middle-class habits of gentility and diligence, the school fails to place its greatest emphasis on the most desirable behavior expectations for children? Taking the question one step further, is it not possible that the lower-class child's weak attraction to the school's standards of gentility and diligence sets him back in his relationship with his teacher to the point where she cannot "reach" him in encouraging the more vital social learnings?

Allison Davis suggests that we re-examine the school curriculum and judge also on these questions:

"1. Does the public school emphasize a range of mental problems and skills which is too narrow to develop most of the abilities necessary for attainment even in middle-class culture itself?

³ Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, *Growing Up in an Anxious Age*, 1952 Yearbook, National Education Association, Washington, D.C., p. 93.