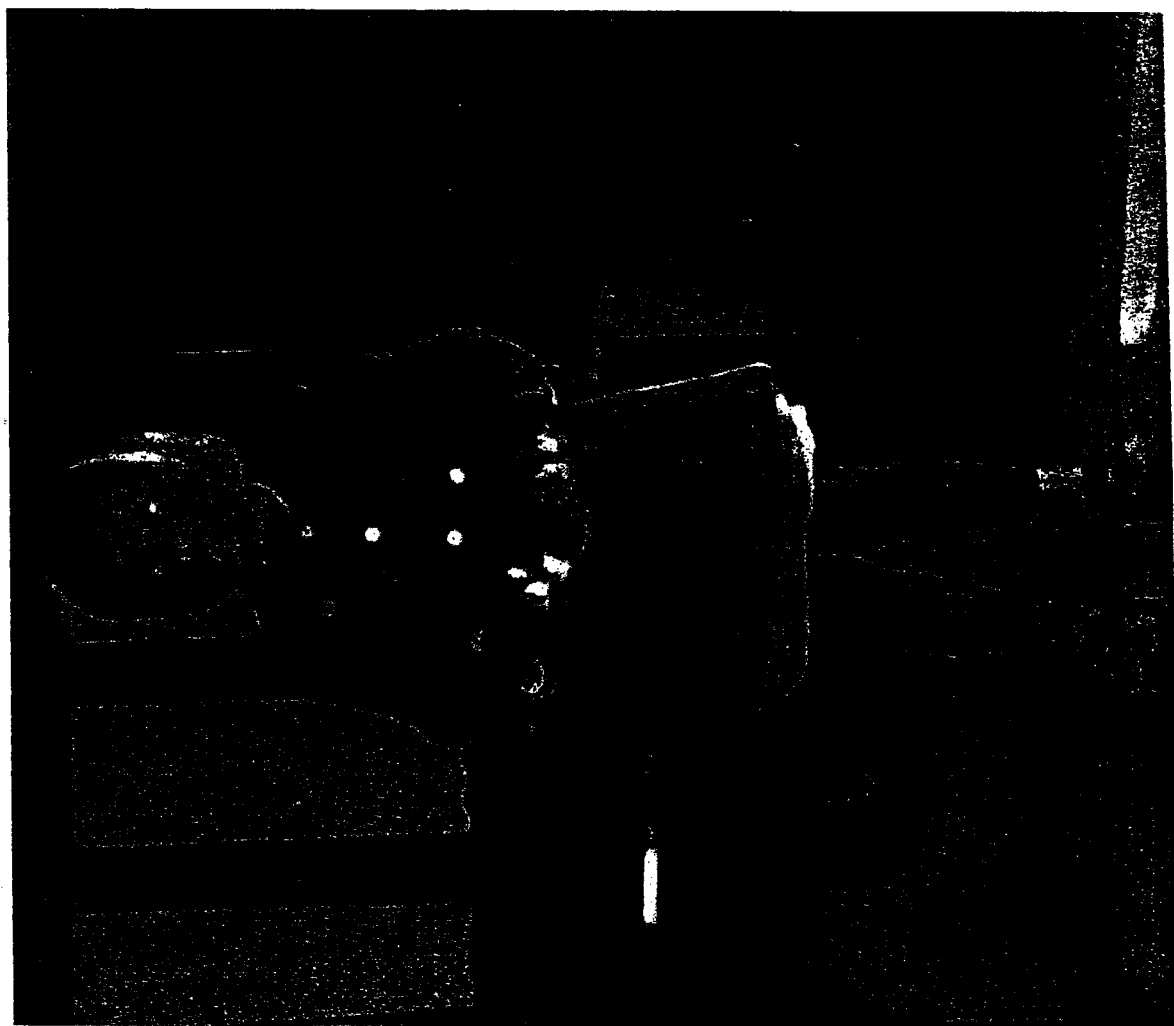


2

cultural deprivation
as language deprivation



schools were established as the uniform means of educating all children.

Studies of young disadvantaged children force us to recognize that merely providing lower-class children with access to standard American formal schooling is not sufficient. They are still deprived of many important opportunities for cultural learning which are ordinarily provided through the home rather than through the school. Because of this, the children are not able to profit maximally from the opportunities that the schools provide. Even though technically they are receiving the same education as middle-class children, in fact they are not. Gross evidences of this fact are seen in the numbers of lower-class children who are held back in school, placed in low-level, slow progress classes, channeled into nonacademic terminal secondary school programs, and so on. The low level of academic achievement of lower-class children provides less conspicuous but even more persuasive evidence of deprivation.

If schools for lower-class children did not teach reading and writing on the grounds that lower-class people do not value these skills very highly anyway and that such skills are not of much importance for the unskilled tasks that the children will eventually be expected to perform, probably even the most anthropologically minded among us would grant that children educated in these schools would be culturally deprived in a genuine sense—deprived of opportunities for cultural learning to which everyone in our society is entitled. If this is a case of cultural deprivation, it should not take extreme subtlety of mind to recognize that the situation is basically the same if children receive instruction in reading and writing in school but fail to learn it or fail to learn it to the usual standards because they have been denied prerequisite learning experiences afforded other children in our society.

Cultural deprivation is thus a useful term in discussions of preschool education for disadvantaged children. It is not just a synonym for *disadvantage*. It allows us to focus on those disadvantages that are relevant to education, while recognizing that the child may be disadvantaged in other ways or may be merely "different."

Even by this restricted definition, cultural deprivation in young children may have many facets. But it is possible to rank different elements of cultural deprivation according to how seriously they handicap the child in school learning and according to the amount of effort that may be necessary to alleviate them. For instance, the child who does not know what a sheep is might encounter an occasional difficulty in understanding something that came up in the course of school learning, but it is hard to imagine any very formidable or basic difficulties that might arise as a result of this particular bit of cultural deprivation. Moreover, the lack is one that could be easily remedied, and very likely would be, the first time it came up in the course of school work. On the other hand, if the child did not understand the meaning of the word *or*, he would experi-

In spite of its wide use, *cultural deprivation* is not a well-accepted term. Mentioning the term in any group of six or more educated adults will usually call forth at least one protest that it is not true that lower-class people do not have a culture—they merely have a different culture.¹ The term has a legitimate meaning, however, which is too important to be brushed aside.

In order to use the term *cultural deprivation*, it is necessary to assume some point of reference. In most dealings with people of different cultures, it is inappropriate to assume a fixed point of reference. To say that the Trobriand Islanders are culturally deprived by our standards is to misuse the term, for it makes no sense to apply our standards to a culture so remote from our own. In dealing with lower-class people in ordinary American communities, however, the various subcultures share many common values and standards, and, with respect to these shared points of reference, it is both legitimate and useful to speak of *cultural deprivation*.

The standards of the American public schools represent one such point of reference. There are standards of knowledge and ability which are consistently held to be valuable in the schools, and any child in the schools who falls short of these standards by reason of his particular cultural background may be said to be culturally deprived. It does not matter that he may have other knowledge and other skills which in other contexts might be valued more highly. There are no schools in our society in which the knowledge and skills peculiar to lower-class groups are valued and fostered. In fact, one of the recurrent themes in American education has been the resistance of underprivileged minority groups and their leaders to efforts to provide them with a special kind of education designed to perpetuate their working-class values and status and to adapt children to it.² Religious and ethnic identity, yes, but lower-class identity, no. Any educational program so conceived would quite properly be regarded as a means of *depriving* poor people of a chance to acquire those cultural benefits necessary for the improvement of their status. Thus, choosing the standards of the schools as a common reference point is not an arbitrary choice. The choice was made when the

ence innumerable and serious difficulties with instructions, concepts, and problems; and this lack is not one that can be remedied on the spur of the moment with a picture, example, or brief explanation.

Assigning priorities to different aspects of cultural deprivation is of great importance when it comes to planning a compensatory preschool program. Should a half-day be devoted to a field trip in which the child will have the opportunity to find out what a sheep looks, smells, feels, and acts like? Should time be so used if this same child also does not understand the use of *or* and other basic words of this kind which may take many hours of instruction to teach? Without some basis for assigning priorities, ignorance of *sheep* and ignorance of *or* are on an equal footing. Indeed, anyone familiar with the more unstructured approaches to preschool education for disadvantaged children is probably aware that more time is devoted to learning about sheep, fire engines, supermarkets, guinea pigs, hair ribbons, freight trains, and similar impedimenta than is devoted to such elementary necessities as learning the meaning of *or*.

Sensory Deprivation versus Cultural Deprivation

In an area where facts are few and speculation runs high, it is perhaps inevitable and to the good that people should look far afield for bodies of fact and theory that might be relevant. The price paid for this intellectual speed-trawling, however, is that some far-fetched ideas occasionally capture the imaginations of people who do not understand them well enough to appreciate their fundamental irrelevance. Such has been the case with sensory deprivation, which threatens to fasten itself firmly onto the concept of cultural deprivation in the minds of many educators.

Sensory deprivation is a well-established phenomenon, although its operation is not yet well understood. When chimpanzees and some other mammals are raised from birth either in no light at all or in plain white light (passed through lenses that destroy all patterning), nerves in the visual system are found to deteriorate irreversibly.³ Animals reared under these conditions are also found to have difficulties in learning certain kinds of visual discriminations which they should be capable of making despite their losses in visual acuity. There is also evidence from extensive experiments with rats that the amount of visual stimulation they receive during the early weeks of life influences the size of the visual cortex (the part of the brain involved in processing visual information) and its chemical composition, although it is not established to what extent behavior is affected or to what extent the effects are reversible.⁴

Some evidence of the same effects has been found in human children. Infants raised in an almost totally blank visual environment and given a minimum of handling were found by Dennis⁵ to be grossly retarded in

such basic aspects of development as learning to sit, stand, walk, and speak. They were also less healthy than physical conditions should have warranted, suggesting a general systemic depression resulting from the sensory deprivation.

From these dramatic findings, inferences have been made that the intellectual backwardness of disadvantaged children may have its roots in sensory deprivation and that the major hope of salvaging these children lies in providing them with an abundance of varied sensory experiences. This inference, however, has very little to recommend it beyond its simplicity. In the first place, sensory deprivation does not appear to have major neurological effects except in very early infancy when nerve cells are not fully developed. Animals that have better developed visual systems at birth, such as the cat, do not show these effects. In order for sensory deprivation to be shown as relevant to disadvantaged children, therefore, it would have to be shown that this deprivation occurs very early. On the contrary, Pasamanick and others have found no evidence of social class differences in rate of development during the first two years of life.⁶

Secondly, sensory deprivation studies have dealt only with very drastic amounts of deprivation far beyond any that occur in ordinary life, lower-class or otherwise. There is no evidence that moderate reductions produce any damage. In fact, evidence accumulated by Berlyne⁷ suggests that there are optimum levels of stimulation and that extreme deviations, whether above or below such levels, may be harmful. Determining the optimum level is not easy. For all we know, lower-class children may be closer to it than middle-class children.

Thirdly, there is ample evidence, again summarized by Berlyne,⁸ that free organisms will tend to seek out an optimum level of stimulation, withdrawing from excess and seeking stimulation when they are not getting enough. One thing that all studies of sensory deprivation have had in common is that the subjects involved have not been free to seek additional stimulation. It is therefore very risky to draw a parallel between these subjects and the slum child who is free to roam the streets.

It would seem that those who have attributed sensory deprivation to lower-class children have not seriously considered what the term implies. It has nothing to do with the educational quality of the stimuli available, but only with their variety, intensity, and patterning. On these purely quantitative bases, automobiles passing in the street are as good as story books, old shoes are as good as dolls, and trash cans are as good as toy drums.

What may be called the "sensory deprivation fad" appears to have originated in a misinterpretation of J. McV. Hunt's influential book, *Intelligence and Experience*.⁹ Hunt made extensive reference to the sensory deprivation studies as one kind of evidence that experience influences

intellectual development, and although he has continued to cite this evidence in discussions of cultural deprivation, he has never maintained that cultural deprivation as we know it is caused by sensory deprivation. In fact, he has hypothesized that during the critical first year of life, when sensory deprivation might have an effect, lower-class children are likely to be exposed to more stimulation than middle-class children.¹⁰

There is little reason to suppose that disadvantaged children have suffered on the sensory account. The source of their backwardness in learning, therefore, must be sought in the *content* of the experiences they have had. It might be possible to construct a machine that would present a child with carefully chosen, though meaningless, changing patterns of shapes, colors, intensities, sounds, smells, tactile experiences, and so on, thus ensuring that the child would have no sensory deprivation whatever. But if this machine provided the only experiences the child received, one would expect him to function like an idiot, for he would not have had a chance to learn anything of value. He would have acquired an organically well-developed brain with nothing in it.

Verbal versus Nonverbal Factors in Cultural Deprivation

Although a lack of verbal learning is the outstanding characteristic of culturally deprived children (as was indicated in Chapter 1), there is a widespread opinion that the roots of cultural deprivation lie deeper than this, that the verbal deficiencies reflect a more basic lack of concrete, non-verbal learning experiences. According to Hunt,

Our traditional emphasis in education upon arithmetic and language skills can well lead us astray in the attempt to develop a program of preschool enrichment. If Piaget's observations are correct, spoken language—that is to say the motor side of the language skill—comes only after images, or the central processes representing objects and events, have been developed out of repeated encounters with those objects and events. . . .¹¹

Counteracting cultural deprivation at this stage of development (three to six) might best be accomplished by giving the child the opportunity to encounter a wide variety of objects, pictures, and appropriate behavior. The setting should encourage him to indulge his inclinations to scrutinize and manipulate the new objects as long as he is interested and should provide him with appropriate answers to his questions. Such varied experiences would foster the development of representative imagery which could then be the referents for spoken words and later for written language.¹²

In keeping with this view, Hunt has strongly endorsed Montessori methods, which consist very largely of nonverbal types of sensory and manipulative experience, for the preschool education of culturally deprived children.

Hunt's view is nicely in accord with a long-standing inclination of early childhood educators toward concrete, nonverbal experience, and it is not surprising that it has received wide endorsement. On the other hand, there is no convincing evidence that lower-class children are, in fact, lacking in concrete experience. No one could deny, of course, that lower-class children have fewer than the normal number of toys and games and that they are not surrounded with the large number of gadgets, appliances, and furnishings found in middle-class homes. But it has not been shown that these are necessary or even the best sources of concrete learning experience. The kinds of perceptual and logical organization that Piaget considers essential for the development of intelligence are general enough that they can be provided by almost any sort of concrete experience.

On rational grounds, it can be claimed that specially designed play materials provide opportunities for concrete learning that are superior to those provided by a haphazard collection of household junk; but, by the same token, it can be argued that the highly gadgeted and automated environment of the modern prosperous home is a very poor one for concrete learning. The laws according to which the physical world operates—and it is these, according to Piaget, which influence the intellectual development of the child—are extremely hard to discern in such an environment. One pushes buttons, and the television set and automatic washer come alive, but the average adult in the home, not to mention the preschool child, is usually ignorant of how they work and utterly confounded when they break down. As a laboratory in which to study the basic workings of the physical world, the typical lower-class environment seems superior to the typical middle-class environment, because the physical events that occur in it are more intelligible.

A more fundamental question is not whether disadvantaged children lack adequate concrete experience but whether concrete experience is the crucial factor in the development of academic aptitude that Hunt, following Piaget, makes it out to be. The surest way of answering this question would be to run controlled experiments in which some children are deliberately deprived of concrete experience and others are not and to vary opportunities for verbal experience in the same way. Clearly, such an experiment cannot be carried out on human children, and there is no point in carrying it out on animals, because verbal experience has no great influence on animal behavior.

However, some kinds of physically handicapped children provide "natural" experiments in enforced deprivation. Children who have been blind from birth are cut off from the major source of concrete sensory experience, and, moreover, they are often so restricted in getting about that they are further prevented from making the full use of the senses that remain. On the other hand, they are not deprived of verbal experi-

ence. With children who have been deaf from birth or an early age, the opposite is true. They are cut off from relatively little concrete experience, but develop virtually no language during the early years and thus have no access to verbal learning. If concrete experience is as vital as Hunt and others have claimed, then blind children should be markedly inferior to deaf children in intellectual competence.

A large number of studies on the intellectual and academic performance of blind and deaf children have provided convincing evidence that the opposite is true: *blind children, on the average, show little or no intellectual and academic deficiency, whereas deaf children are typically about 10 points below normal in IQ and show gross inadequacies in academic achievement.* Deaf children are from two to five years retarded in achievement throughout the school years, and, even with a longer period of schooling than is given to normal children, they do not, on the average, progress beyond the seventh-grade level.¹³ These results correspond quite closely with those found for more severely culturally deprived children. The parallels do not end at this point. When one looks at their profiles of aptitude and achievement scores—at the kinds of performance on which they are strongest and weakest—remarkably similar patterns emerge for the deaf and for the culturally deprived.

A comparison of blind with deaf children thus reveals that children can be quite markedly deprived of concrete sensory experience and yet develop normal intellects and function well academically, whereas if they are deprived of language experience, they are seriously handicapped in these areas even though they have full access to concrete experience.

Even more striking evidence of the importance of verbal factors is provided when one looks at social-class differences among deaf children. If social-class differences in opportunities for concrete experience are as important as they have been made out to be, then one should expect to find that deaf children from poorer homes would be very markedly inferior in intelligence to deaf children from more privileged homes, since learning for deaf children would depend almost entirely on opportunities for concrete experience. No direct investigations were found, but indirect evidence could be obtained from comparisons of deaf children in day schools and deaf children in public residential schools—the latter children more often coming from low-income and rural backgrounds. Such comparisons did not reveal any differences related to social background.¹⁴ This finding was reinforced by a study by Bereiter correlating the intelligence of 300 deaf children in a public residential school with the educational level of their nondeaf parents. The correlation so obtained was much lower than that obtained in other studies using hearing children and their parents and was, in fact, lower than that obtained in a study using children who were reared apart from their parents.¹⁵ Thus, although deaf children usually live at home until the age of five, their

level of intelligence does not seem to bear the relation to the socioeconomic level of the home that it does in the case of hearing children.

In light of the substantial intellectual and academic retardation found in deaf children, this finding may be interpreted as meaning that deaf children are culturally deprived in much the way that lower-class children are deprived, regardless of their home backgrounds. It would appear from this that social-class differences in opportunities for concrete experience either do not exist or are not important, whereas lack of opportunity for language experience has serious effects that closely correspond to those found in cultural deprivation.

It may seem farfetched to compare the deaf child, who often has no language at all, with the disadvantaged child, who usually does have a language, even though an immature and nonstandard one. To understand how the two can turn out to be academically handicapped in about the same degree, it is necessary to consider in more detail the role of language in intellectual development.

For purposes of getting along socially and of self-expression, language is a convenience but not a necessity for the young child. It is quite possible to make one's wants known, to enter actively into play and other social relationships, and to give vent to one's feelings without language. Young deaf children do this, and it appears that lower-class children also rely to a considerable extent on nonverbal means for these purposes. People who work with disadvantaged preschool children report a considerable number of children who at four years of age hardly speak at all. Language is apparently dispensable enough in the life of the lower-class child for an occasional child to get along without it altogether. Yet, such children are often indistinguishable from their peers in other areas of behavior.

Language becomes a virtual necessity, however, when one moves from the social uses of language to the transmission of knowledge from one person to another and to the performance of certain operations with concepts. From what is known about verbal communication in lower-class homes, it would appear that the cognitive uses of language are severely restricted, especially in communication between adults and children. Language is primarily used to control behavior, to express sentiments and emotions, to permit the vicarious sharing of experiences, and to keep the social machinery of the home running smoothly. These are important uses of language. Many lower-class people are more skillful in them than better-educated middle-class people. But what is lacking by comparison is the use of language to explain, to describe, to instruct, to inquire, to hypothesize, to analyze, to compare, to deduce, and to test. And these are the uses that are necessary for academic success.

If this characterization of verbal communication within the lower-class home is accurate, the parallels between deaf and culturally deprived

children become much clearer. The culturally deprived child may be exposed to social uses of language from which the deaf child is barred, but in this area the deaf child is able to compensate for his lack by non-verbal means of communication. With regard to the important cognitive uses of language, however, both kinds of children are seriously deprived—the deaf child because he cannot understand what is said, the lower-class child because he is not sufficiently exposed to language in its cognitive uses.

Thorough research on verbal communication within families remains to be done. There is evidence that verbal communication of any sort between parents and children is limited in lower-class homes, and, of course, the larger size of families, the frequent lack of fathers in the home, the fact that mothers often work, and the crowded conditions that force children out of doors and away from adult contacts would all contribute to such a lack. Studies by Srodbeck¹⁶ indicate that lower-class mothers make more use of simple imperatives ("Leave it alone"; "Shut up") and less use of explanations and statements in dealing with their children. In some very interesting research by Hess,¹⁷ middle- and lower-class Negro mothers were asked to teach their children certain things in an experimental situation. The lower-class mothers seemed generally at a loss as to how to do it, could not give clear explanations or directions, and did not know how to motivate the child, again falling back on simple imperatives devoid of instructive content. From the protocols cited by Hess, it would appear that the lower-class mothers had never attempted this kind of teaching before. The "errors" they made were very much like those one observes in novice teachers who are unaccustomed to talking to children.

Bernstein¹⁸ has theorized that the speech of lower-class people follows a linguistic code that is ideally suited to maintaining social relationships, that is adequate for sharing familiar experiences and opinions, but that is inadequate for expressing personal or original opinions, for analysis and careful reasoning, for dealing with anything hypothetical or beyond the present, and for explaining anything very complex. He sees this linguistic code as growing naturally out of the conditions of lower-class life and serving a useful purpose in it, but he also sees the child who is brought up in such an environment as being trapped by the restrictions of this linguistic code and unable to operate at the high conceptual and logical level that is required in formal education. Bernstein's theory has especially alarming implications for the lower-class child because it suggests that the child does not merely lack certain of the language skills that middle-class children have; he has learned a self-perpetuating language code that effectively bars him from acquiring these skills.

Bernstein's theory and Hess's observations on the inability of lower-class mothers to teach combine to suggest a more fundamental reason

for the deficiencies of lower-class children in school-relevant learning. When a cultural group possesses a distinctive body of knowledge and beliefs which the older generation feels obliged to pass on in some organized fashion to the younger generation, it is reasonable to suppose that the group will develop the language and teaching skills that are needed for such a purpose. Among disorganized and dispossessed minority groups, however, the culture appears to center around attitudes, interests, a style of life, and a scattering of unorganized beliefs and superstitions so unformalized that they may be transmitted without explanation, argument, or detailed exposition. Deliberate teaching is not a normal or necessary part of the adult role in such cultural groups, and neither the skills nor the language peculiar to teaching are developed and maintained. By contrast, in middle-class American society, as in most self-maintaining societies, nearly every adult can and does teach. It is a normal part of the adult role performed almost without awareness, particularly in the adult's relations with children.

Cultural deprivation, then, has a double edge. The lower-class child is not without culture, but he is deprived of that part of culture that can only be acquired through teaching—the knowledge, the meanings, the explanations, the structured beliefs that make up the conceptual furniture of culture. Beyond that, the child spends his early childhood in an environment where teaching does not take place and where the language with which teaching is carried out is not used; therefore, he may not even learn *how to be taught*, and when he is exposed to teaching, he may behave much as if he were mentally retarded or devoid of language altogether.

Some Language Problems of Culturally Deprived Children

All that can be concluded about disadvantaged children from their test performance is that their use of language is similar to that of the average child a year or so younger. The several studies that have attempted to render a more descriptive account of the language of disadvantaged children show much the same thing. In such characteristics as sentence length, word variety, and the use of various grammatical categories and constructions, the language of disadvantaged children resembles that of other children at a lower age level.¹⁹ From this the natural conclusion would be that lower-class and middle-class children speak essentially the same language, but lower-class children are about a year behind in their mastery of it.

As the linguist Chomsky has pointed out, however, descriptive studies of the kind referred to above do not really tell us what a child *can do* with language. A certain grammatical construction may not appear in a

sample of the child's speech, and yet he may be fully capable of understanding and using it when the need arises. Conversely, a certain term or construction might appear, but the child's use of it might be so restricted to a few special cases that it would be misleading to credit him with mastery of it.²⁰ Chomsky goes on to say that

if anything far-reaching and real is to be discovered about the actual grammar of the child, then rather devious kinds of observations of his performance, his abilities, and his comprehension in many different kinds of circumstance will have to be obtained, so that a variety of evidence may be brought to bear on the attempt to determine what is in fact his underlying linguistic competence at each stage of development.²¹

No systematic research of the kinds Chomsky deems essential has yet been carried out on disadvantaged children, but the writers have made use of two "devious kinds of observations" that may help to throw light on questions of basic linguistic competence. One of these is the Cognitive Maturity Test developed by Engelmann, which tests the child's ability to repeat sentences of various kinds and to answer questions using information contained in the sentences. The other kind of observation is more informal, based on efforts to teach children various language skills. These attempts provide particularly revealing evidence of what children can do, as contrasted with what they do do, with language.

These observations are quite limited, being based on intensive work with only 30 disadvantaged Negro preschool children and on less intensive work with perhaps 50 more. However, there are no other data currently available that go much below the surface in describing the nature of language deprivation.

The speech of the severely deprived children seems to consist not of distinct words, as does the speech of middle-class children of the same age, but rather of whole phrases or sentences that function like giant words. That is to say, these "giant word" units cannot be taken apart by the child and re-combined; they cannot be transformed from statements to questions, from imperatives to declaratives, and so on. Instead of saying "He's a big dog," the deprived child says "He bih daw." Instead of saying "I ain't got no juice," he says "Uai-ga-na-ju." Instead of saying "That is a red truck," he says "Da-re-truh." Once the listener has become accustomed to this style of speech, he may begin to hear it as if all the sounds were there, and may get the impression that he is hearing articles when in fact there is only a pause where the article should be. He may believe that the child is using words like *it*, *is*, *if*, and *in*, when in fact he is using the same sound for all of them—something on the order of "ih." (This becomes apparent if the child is asked to repeat the statement "It is in the box." After a few attempts in which he becomes confused as to the number of "ih's" to insert, the child is likely to be reduced to a stammer.)

If the problem were merely one of faulty pronunciation, it would not be so serious. But it appears that the child's faulty pronunciation arises from his inability to deal with sentences as sequences of meaningful parts. Even a sophisticated adult will have difficulty pronouncing a very long word if he is unable to deal with it in parts (the reader might take a try at EMPIANASROFLALILMINIAL, reading it aloud once and then trying to repeat it from memory). In the Cognitive Maturity Test, children are called upon to repeat sentences of varying degrees of complexity. The severely disadvantaged child will tend to give merely an approximate rendition of the over-all sound profile of the sentence, often leaving out the sounds in the middle, as is common when people are trying to reproduce a meaningless series—this in spite of the fact that the words themselves are often very simple, like "A big truck is not a little truck."

It may be objected that the child cannot say the sentence because he cannot understand it, and questioning of the child often discloses that he does not understand those sentences he cannot produce. But his inability to produce certain sentences also prevents him from learning to understand them. For instance, after dozen of repetitions of "His father said he could have candy or a cookie," the child may come no closer to rendering the last three words of the sentence than "a-uh cookie." It will then become evident from questioning that the child does not understand that a choice is involved. But if the child is unable to produce or differently from *and*, he is in a poor position to learn the difference.

The culturally deprived child is often able to follow fairly lengthy commands. Among the 15 children in the initial Bereiter-Engelmann study were more than the average number for their age who could correctly execute the following instructions taken from the Stanford-Binet intelligence test: "First you put the pencil on the chair, then shut the door, then bring me the box." Where they had difficulty was in distinguishing between commands that differ only with respect to structure words or inflections: "Show me the one that is yellow" versus "Show me the one that is not yellow"; "Lift up your hand" versus "Lift up your hands"; "Pick up the red one and the green one" versus "Pick up the red one or the green one."

Braine²² and Fraser and Brown²³ in their studies of the grammar of younger but more privileged children, have noted that, among these children also, it is the smaller connectives and other structure words that are lacking. To this extent, the culturally deprived child resembles a culturally privileged child of a younger age. But there is a very important difference. The culturally privileged two-year-old uses a "reduced grammar." He leaves out words that he does not know and forms condensed sentences out of the words he does know how to handle. Thus, even though his sentences may consist of only two or three words, they are

distinct words, and he is able to recombine them flexibly because they exist for him as independent entities. Disadvantaged children, on the other hand, often blend the words together with noises that take the place of words and inflections they do not know, so that all the words tend to become fused into a whole. This leaves no distinctive units that can be recombined to generate new sentences.

The culturally deprived child does with sentences what the culturally privileged child does when he is trying to say a big word—he approximates the whole sequence of noises. But the culturally privileged child seems to acquire very early the notion that sentences are made up of words, so that he imitates the noises that occur *within* words but not the noises that occur *between* familiar words. Thus, the culturally privileged child builds up his sentences by adding words to them as he masters them: from "Mommy read" to "Mommy read book" to "Mommy read me book" and eventually to "Mommy, I want you to read me this book." The culturally deprived child grappling with such a sentence would probably start off with some amalgam like "re-ih-bu," with which he would then be stuck. The words "me" and "this" would be lost in noise, as they would be in any other sentences where they occurred, and thus it would be difficult for them ever to emerge as distinct, usable words.

The inflexibility that results from this way of treating words within statements is nowhere so clearly illustrated as in the culturally deprived child's inability to reverse the elements in a statement. For the child who treats sentences as patterns of words, it is a fairly simple matter to learn that the phrase "Harold and Tyrone" can be transformed into "Tyrone and Harold" without changing its sense. Given a few examples, such a child can then go on to handle any problem of the kind "What's another way of saying '_____' and '_____'?" But this task has proved to be one of the most difficult to teach culturally deprived children. When asked "What's another way of saying 'Green and red'?" they will persist in saying "Green and red." Correcting the response does not seem to help. They treat "Green and red" as if it were a three-syllable word, so that to transform it to "Red and green" makes no more sense than to transform "Wonderful" into "Fulderwon," and the generalization of the pattern to other instances is just as hard for them to grasp.

Perhaps the strongest indication that this "giant word" syndrome is not merely a manifestation of immature language comprehension is that the children have a strong tendency to revert to it even after they have been taught to handle certain patterns of discrete words. This shows up most clearly in arithmetic, where the entire vocabulary is new and the children cannot be accused of lapsing back into imitation of the way they hear the same thing said at home. Children in the Bereiter-Engelmann preschool had learned to handle equations of the form "Two plus one equals three," making substitutions to create other equations, e.g.,

"Two plus zero equals two." Even here, some children would continually lapse into amalgamations: "Two pluh wunic'k three." Having done this, they were no longer able to substitute other numbers for the "one," it having become fused with the beginning sounds of "equals."

Combating this tendency to fuse separate words into indivisible wholes has been one of the continuing struggles in teaching effective language to culturally deprived children. One hears a considerable amount of talk about the value of encouraging culturally deprived children to speak in sentences. But this does not really seem to be the problem, if by speaking sentences is meant uttering extended strings of sounds which can be interpreted as sentences. The problem is to get the children to speak in words and to make statements that consist of words rather than amalgamated noises.

The difficulty that culturally deprived children have in treating words as separate entities within statements can go a long way toward explaining many of their other language problems. For instance, vocabulary growth should be slower even when there are ample opportunities for learning. As the new word is used in different sentences, it becomes fused with different noises and therefore becomes unrecognizable as the same word. The "giant word" syndrome would also help to explain the difficulties deprived children have in learning to read, for in reading also the word is the basic unit, and the child who cannot deal with words as unitary things in his spoken language should be expected to have difficulty in mastering a code which is, in essence, a code for translating clusters of printed characters into spoken words.²⁴

The "giant word" hypothesis is consistent with Bernstein's description of the restricted linguistic codes employed by lower-class speakers and is supported by his research. In comparing pauses and hesitations in the speech of lower- and middle-class adolescent boys, Bernstein concluded that lower-class boys used longer phrase units in their speech, which might imply that their speech consists of larger "chunks" that are treated in speech as if they were single words.²⁵ This leads to a more fluent but much less flexible use of language.

In keeping with Bernstein's theory that lower-class language is mainly an instrument for the maintenance of social relationships, the writers have found culturally deprived children to be strangely indifferent to the content of verbal utterances while being acutely concerned with the effect that their utterances have on other people. A question that begins with "Can you tell" or "Do you know" is invariably answered "Yes," often before it is completed. These beginnings are evidently recognized as signals that "Yes" is the desired answer. *Yes-no* questions have to be used with great circumspection in the teaching of these children because the children are so adept at and intent upon "reading" the teacher's expressions and inflections for clues to the desired response. The chil-

dren may even succeed in giving correct answers without fully understanding what *yes* and *no* mean. Several children have been encountered who responded alternatively with "Yes" and "No" or the corresponding head motions, but who did not know which kind of motion went with "Yes" and which went with "No."

Lack of experience in the expository uses of language was sometimes revealed in the children's limited control over voice volume. These children typically showed two levels of volume: one a barely audible mumble used for replying to questions (a self-effacing, "keep out of trouble" tone of voice), the other a loud shout used for commanding attention or voicing complaints and taunts. They lacked the middle range of volume ordinarily used for conveying information.

In terms of the child's intellectual competence, however, the most damaging aspect of this social-centered language is the child's inability to talk to himself. As previously noted, he can often follow complicated instructions. Providing he is able to make use of nonverbal helps, such as pointing, manipulating, and gesturing, he can also give directions to someone else. But, within his own behavior, he often cannot relate what he says with what he does. At a teeter-totter, he can follow the direction to "Push it down" or "Lift it up," but if asked to tell what he is doing, he may say that he is pushing it down when he is lifting it up. As Luria has shown through extensive investigations, the ability to control one's own behavior through language does not come about automatically as one learns to say and do various things. The ability to integrate the two must itself be learned.²⁶ With culturally deprived children, it appears that speech develops as a form of social behavior that is more or less independent of motor behavior. This does not prevent the child from becoming proficient in motor skills, but it becomes a serious handicap when motor acts must be coupled with judgments, as in drawing, writing, and solving problems involving manipulation of objects. The culturally deprived child then shows much the same dissociation between language and action that has been observed in mentally retarded children.²⁷

As Luria and Vygotsky have explained, controlling one's actions through one's own words is a necessary step toward the mastery of dialectical reasoning, which in essence is controlling verbal behavior through an "internal dialog" by means of which one may solve a problem, working a step at a time.²⁸ This is a use of language quite different from its social uses, and the deficiencies of culturally deprived children in this use are most striking. At the most elementary level, these deficiencies show up in the child's inability to use an *if-then* rule.

In the initial Bereiter-Engelmann experiment, disadvantaged children easily learned the rule "If it has a beginning and an end, it's a word" (beginnings and ends being appropriately designated so that the rule

was valid). But even after the children had learned to identify beginnings and ends correctly, they could not with any consistency apply the rule. Simple as the rule appears, its application requires an internal dialog, a chain of verbal steps on the following order: "Does it have a beginning? Does it have an end? Did I answer both questions 'Yes'? If I did, it is a word. If I didn't, it is not a word." The children could not ask themselves these questions. If the teacher asked them, they could answer the first two questions, but they could not use their own answers to these first two questions in order to answer the third question. Because of this inability to use the information gained from verbal operations in subsequent operations, they were effectively limited to "one-shot" intellectual acts. There is a striking similarity in this phenomenon to that noted by Bloom and Broder²⁹ in the problem-solving processes of select college students who were encountering academic difficulties. Faced with problems that could be dealt with by a "one-shot" approach, these students were able to perform adequately, but when faced with complex problems that could not be solved except by a sequence of steps, such students would brood a while and then say "I don't know the answer to that one." Answers either had to be grasped at once, or they were inaccessible.

This ability to carry on a dialog through which information is accumulated and used—a dialog either with others or with oneself—would seem to constitute the very core of verbal intelligence. All other aspects of language—vocabulary, fluency of expression, standard usage, and the like—are subordinate to it and of little account in academic performance except as "fuel" for such dialog. Thus, culturally deprived children, lacking the most rudimentary forms of constructive dialog, are cut down at the very trunk of academic aptitude. Whatever they possess in the way of expressive language, even though it is also inadequate, serves only to cover a deficiency that is much more profound.

Studies by Loban and others have been cited as evidence that culturally deprived children do possess all the necessary elements of English grammar and syntax, even though they make scanty use of some of them.³⁰ What is crucial, however, is not the extent to which their language is technically capable of conveying thoughts and information but the extent to which the children themselves are able to use language in this way. A clever philosopher might be able to rewrite Aristotle using only the vocabulary and grammar of a culturally deprived child. But this same child might not be able to express any ideas whatever in an ordered, cumulative sequence.

As the preceding observations suggest, many disadvantaged children of preschool age come very close to the total lack of ability to use language as a device for acquiring and processing information. Language for them is unwieldy and not very useful. For some of them, speaking is clearly no fun, and they manage as far as possible to get along

without it. Others enjoy social speech and use it a good deal in play and social intercourse, but seldom for purposes of learning or reasoning; their language, as they use it, is not adequate for these purposes.

Social and Emotional Deprivation

Many preschool programs for disadvantaged children are based on the assumption that the central problems of disadvantaged children are not intellectual or cognitive at all, but are problems of social and emotional adjustment. The writers do not know of any evidence to support the assumption. All of the emotional and behavioral disorders that are found in other children can be found in disadvantaged children, of course, and some of them are found in greater numbers. *But there are no emotional or behavioral disorders that have been shown to be uniquely associated with poverty, lower-class status, or minority-group status in preschool children.* A teacher of disadvantaged children, therefore, may expect to have the same kinds of personality problems to deal with as she would with any other preschool children, and should be able to deal with them in the same ways.

Since the view that disadvantaged children are "emotionally deprived" or "socially deprived" is very widespread, however, it may be worthwhile to point out some of the misunderstandings on which this view is based.

1. Cases of very severe personality disturbance are probably more common among poor children. Because these cases are so dramatic, they tend to color one's whole perception of disadvantaged preschool groups. It would be a mistake to build a whole program around children of this kind, however, to the neglect of the vast majority of disadvantaged children whose major problems are not in the area of emotion.

2. Older disadvantaged children often do show personality problems directly associated with their lower-class or minority-group status (feelings of inferiority or resentment). Older children frequently show the damaging effects of school failure on personality development. The symptoms have seldom begun to develop among preschool children, however,²¹ and it is difficult to see what preventive measures could be taken within the domain of the school other than providing a solid skill foundation and fostering self-confidence.

3. It is fairly easy to produce emotional disturbances in young children. Many of the symptoms of maladjustment that are sometimes conspicuous in preschool classes for disadvantaged children (such as tantrums, uncontrollability, withdrawal, and clinging) arise directly from inept or misguided management practices. Strodbeck has reported the results of an experimental preschool class in which the major em-

phasis was on "mothering"—holding the children and nurturing any interest they manifested in training materials. Strodbeck notes,

The absence of the principal teacher from the classroom in order to perform this mothering, coupled with the permissive atmosphere, seemed to release sibling rivalry and regressive behavior. It wasn't until the eleventh week that tantrums were brought under control. The quasi-therapeutic milieu proved to be helpful neither as therapy nor as education.²²

Similar children in other classes that were run in a more controlled fashion showed no such emotional disturbances.

4. Perhaps the most widespread misunderstanding comes from a failure to distinguish between behavior that reveals inappropriate social learning and behavior that indicates more deep-seated personality disturbances. Physical aggression, for instance, may be a danger sign in middle-class children, but, for many lower-class children, it may be merely a routine way of settling disputes. Preschool disadvantaged children are likely to show distressing tendencies to hit, bite, kick, scream, run wildly about, cling, climb into laps, steal, lie, hide, ignore directions, and defy authority. These are quite inappropriate behaviors for the classroom, and they will have to be replaced by more appropriate ones. This is not always an easy task for the teacher, but she should see the task for what it is: *teaching naive children how to act in a new situation*, not of administering psychotherapy to malformed personalities.

When viewed in this way, the inappropriate social behavior of disadvantaged children may be regarded as but another facet of cultural deprivation, as another way in which disadvantaged children lack the kinds of learning necessary for success in school. It is an important aspect, for until disadvantaged children have learned the appropriate ways to behave in school, it may be impossible for them to progress in academic areas. But, in practical terms, it is a minor problem compared to the lack of prerequisite language learning, because it may be remedied so much more quickly and simply. A large number of eight-week summer preschool classes for disadvantaged children have made great progress in teaching appropriate social behaviors in school, while making virtually no inroads against the children's lacks in verbal learning.

Summary

This chapter has explored a number of different aspects of deprivation in young lower-class children. Cultural deprivation was defined as a lack of those particular kinds of learning that are important for success in school. In this respect, it is legitimate to speak of lower-class children as being "deprived" of culture, even though they may have a culture which is complete and adequate from other points of view.

Cultural deprivation was distinguished from sensory deprivation, which pertains only to the quantity of sensory stimulation an organism receives during the crucial early stages of neural maturation. It was shown that there is no reason to believe that sensory deprivation is a factor in the deficiencies of lower-class children and that it is largely irrelevant to cultural deprivation, which has to do with *what* the child has learned rather than with the amount of stimulation he has received.

The relative importance of concrete, exploratory learning and verbal learning was investigated. Evidence was cited which suggests that lack of concrete learning has relatively little to do with the intellectual and academic deficiencies of disadvantaged children and that it is the lack of verbal learning, in particular the lack of those kinds of learning that can only be transmitted from adults to children through language, that is mainly responsible for these deficiencies. Thus, there is justification for treating cultural deprivation as synonymous with language deprivation.

The language deficiencies of disadvantaged children were seen to consist not of deficiencies in vocabulary and grammar as such but of failure to master certain uses of language. Language for the disadvantaged child seems to be an aspect of social behavior which is not of vital importance. The disadvantaged child masters a language that is adequate for maintaining social relationships and for meeting his social and material needs, but he does not learn how to use language for obtaining and transmitting information, for monitoring his own behavior, and for carrying on verbal reasoning. In short, he fails to master the cognitive uses of language, which are the uses that are of primary importance in school.

Two special weaknesses of the language development of lower-class children were noted. One is the tendency to treat sentences as "giant words" that cannot be taken apart and recombined. This leads to an inflexible kind of language that does not make use of the full potentialities of the grammar and syntax, and it makes the learning of new vocabulary and structures more difficult. The second weakness, which may well be an outgrowth of the first, is a failure to master the use of structural words and inflections which are necessary for the expression and manipulation of logical relationships. The problem for culturally deprived children is not so much learning to speak in sentences as learning to speak in sentences that are composed of discrete words.

Many educators assume that the disadvantaged child's basic problems are social and emotional rather than intellectual or cognitive. It was pointed out, however, that there is no evidence that underprivileged status has any unique effects on personality development in young children. Its effects, if any, are probably only to increase the incidence of the same kinds of personality disturbances found in children of all social groups. The widespread use of the terms *social deprivation* and *emotional*

deprivation seems to be based on misunderstandings arising from (1) generalizing from a few extreme cases, (2) projecting the problems of older disadvantaged children on to younger ones who do not, in fact, show them, (3) blaming the home environment for behavior disturbances that are actually the result of inept or misguided management in the preschool itself, and (4) interpreting normal lower-class behavior as symptomatic of severe maladjustment. The inappropriate social behavior that many disadvantaged children reveal in school is best interpreted as but another aspect of cultural deprivation, as a lack of particular kinds of learning that are important for success in school.

Notes

1. See B. Mackler and M. G. Giddings, "Cultural Deprivation: A Study in Mythology," *Teachers College Record*, 66 (1965), 608-613.
2. L. A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1961).
3. A. H. Riesen, "Effects of Stimulus Deprivation on the Development and Atrophy of the Visual Sensory System," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 30 (1960), 23-36.
4. E. L. Bennett, Marian C. Diamond, D. Krech, and M. R. Rosenzweig, "Chemical and Anatomical Plasticity of Brain," *Science*, 146 (1964), 610-619.
5. W. Dennis, "Causes of Retardation Among Institutional Children: Iran," *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 96 (1960), 47-59.
6. Hilda Knobloch and B. Pasamanick, "Environmental Factors Affecting Human Development, Before and After Birth," *Pediatrics*, 26 (1960), 210-218. See also Nancy Bayley and H. E. Jones, "Environmental Correlates of Mental and Motor Development: A Cumulative Study from Infancy to Six Years," *Child Development*, 4 (1937), 329-341.
7. D. E. Berlyne, *Conflict, Arousal, and Curiosity* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1960).
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 200-209.
9. J. McV. Hunt, *Intelligence and Experience* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1961).
10. J. McV. Hunt, "The Psychological Basis for Using Preschool Enrichment as an Antidote for Cultural Deprivation," *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 10 (1964), 209-248.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
12. J. McV. Hunt, "How Children Develop Intellectually," *Children*, 11 (1964), 89.
13. S. A. Kirk, *Educating Exceptional Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962); I. S. Fufeld, "A Cross-section Evaluation of the Academic Program of Schools for the Deaf," *Gallaudet College Bulletin*, 3 (1954); C. P. Goetzinger and C. L. Rousey, "Educational Achievement of Deaf Children," *American Annals of the Deaf*, 104 (1959), 221-231; H. R. Myklebust, *The Psychology of Deafness* (New York: Grune & Stratton, Inc., 1960); Mildred C. Templin, *The Development of Reasoning in Children with Normal and Deaf Hearing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1950); Mildred C. Templin, "A Qualitative Analysis of Explanations and Physical Causality,"

American Annals of the Deaf, 99 (1954), 252-269; H. Z. Wooden, "Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children," in *Exceptional Children in the Schools*, ed. L. M. Dunn (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1963), pp. 339-411; S. C. Ashcroft, "The Blind and Partially Seeing," *Review of Educational Research*, 29 (1959), 519-528.

14. Myklebust, *op. cit.*; Templin, *The Development of Reasoning . . .*; S. P. Quigley and D. R. Frisina, "Institutionalization and Psycho-educational Development of Deaf Children," *Council for Exceptional Children Monographs*, Series A, No. 3 (1963).

15. C. Bereiter, "The Relative Importance of Verbal and Nonverbal Factors in Cultural Deprivation: Evidence from Children with Sensory Handicaps," (Urbana, Ill.: Institute for Research on Exceptional Children [mimeo], 1965).

16. F. L. Stroudbeck, "Progress Report: The Reading Readiness Nursery: Short-term Intervention Technique" (Chicago: University of Chicago, Social Psychology Laboratory [mimeo], 1964).

17. R. D. Hess and Virginia Shipman, "Early Blocks to Children's Learning," *Children*, 12 (1965), 189-194.

18. B. Bernstein, "Social Class and Linguistic Development" in *Education, Economy, and Society*, ed. A. H. Halsey, J. Floud, and C. A. Anderson (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961); B. Bernstein, "Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences," *American Anthropologist*, 66 (1964), No. 6, Part 2.

19. Mildred C. Templin, *Certain Language Skills in Children* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957); Mildred C. Templin, "Relation of Speech and Language Development to Intelligence and Sociometric Status," *Volta Review*, 60 (1958), 331-334; W. Loban, *The Language of Elementary School Children* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1963); W. Loban, *Problems in Oral English* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1965).

20. N. Chomsky, Formal Discussion of "The Development of Grammar in Child Language" by W. Miller and Susan Ervin, *Society for Research in Child Development Monographs*, 29 (1964), 35-39.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

22. M. D. S. Braine, "The Ontogeny of English Phrase Structure," *Language*, 39 (1963), 1-13.

23. R. Brown and C. Fraser, "The Acquisition of Syntax," *Society for Research in Child Development Monographs*, 29 (1964), 43-79.

24. J. B. Carroll, "The Analysis of Reading Instruction: Perspectives from Psychology and Linguistics," in *Theories of Learning and Instruction*, 63rd Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

25. B. Bernstein, "Linguistic Codes, Hesitation Phenomena, and Intelligence," *Language and Speech*, 5 (1962), 31-46.

26. A. R. Luria, *The Role of Speech in the Regulation of Normal and Abnormal Behavior* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1961).

27. N. O'Connor and Beate Hermelin, *Speech and Thought in Severe Subnormality* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963).

28. Luria, *op. cit.*; L. S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1962).

29. B. S. Bloom and Lois J. Broder, *Problem-solving Processes of College Students* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950).

30. Loban, *The Language of Elementary School Children and Problems in*

Oral English. More recent linguistic findings, however, suggest that this is indeed an oversimplification of the disadvantaged child's language problems, particularly in the case of lower-class Negro children. In studying urban Negro dialects, Stewart has identified a number of dialect levels, the lowest of which is spoken by most children but usually not by their parents. This dialect is evidently maintained by children and passed on from one generation of children to another with little adult influence. It should therefore not be surprising that this dialect, besides being structurally simpler than adult dialects, should also be exceedingly limited in its cognitive usefulness. See W. A. Stewart, "Urban Negro Speech: Sociolinguistic Factors Affecting English Teaching," in *Proceedings of Conference on Urban School Dialects and Language Learning* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1965).

In a report given at the 1965 meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Beryl Bailey of Hunter College noted two important characteristics of lower-class southern Negro dialects: (1) the presence of an enormous number of homonyms (words that sound the same but have different meanings) arising from the tendency to omit final consonants; and (2) the strong influence of Creole grammatical structure, which is essentially uninflected, depending on words at the beginning of the sentence to indicate person, tense, number, etc. A dialect that has numerous homonyms should itself be difficult to learn as a first language, presenting manifold possibilities of confusion comparable to those encountered by a deaf child in trying to learn English through lip-reading, where a great many different words look the same (are produced by the same observable mouth movements). Faced with such difficulties, it is entirely possible that lower-class Negro children would be retarded in the learning of their own dialect, even if they were provided with the same amount of language experience as children from standard English-speaking homes. If Bailey is correct in her hypothesis that Negro dialects have a Creole grammatical structure, this would indicate that standard English is a foreign language to the lower-class Negro child as regards grammatical structure, even though it uses much the same vocabulary. This would tend to support the position set forth in this chapter that the crucial problem for such children is learning the grammar of English rather than increasing their vocabularies.

31. D. P. Ausubel and Pearl Ausubel, "Ego Development Among Segregated Negro Children," in *Education in Depressed Areas*, ed. H. Passow (New York: Teachers College Bureau of Publications, 1963).

32. Stroudbeck, *op. cit.*