

*Teaching
Disadvantaged Children
in the Preschool*

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Teaching Strategies and Reading Program

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chosen or rewritten to teach important language skills

- A program and method of teaching that has been experimentally tested and shown to produce dramatic effects

Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Preschool provides a program that will enable disadvantaged children to start first grade on an equal footing with more privileged children. The educational needs of disadvantaged children are examined in this light and the inadequacies of traditional "experience" approaches pointed out.

The bulk of this innovative book is devoted to a detailed presentation of teaching methods and curricula that have been found effective in attaining the stated objectives. Emphasis is on academic learning achieved through direct verbal instruction. Suitable both as a text and reference in education and special education courses, the book is also recommended for in-service teachers participating in workshop programs on the culturally deprived child.

Features . . .

- A complete detailed curriculum guide—specific procedures rather than generalities—covering everything from how to handle visitors to how to teach "if-then" reasoning
- A language program that can take a child step by step from virtually no language at all to a mastery of the concepts and forms necessary for his handling regular primary school instruction
- A preschool music program made up of singable songs that have been

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CARL BEREITER and SIEGFRIED ENGELMANN have worked together at the University of Illinois since 1964 on projects in early childhood education, supported by the U. S. Office of Education. They have served as consultants to a number of organizations concerned with preschool programs for the disadvantaged, including the Pennsylvania and New York state departments of public instruction. Dr. Bereiter (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin) is Coordinator of Research for a newly established center for curriculum research and development for the preschool education of disadvantaged children at Illinois, is a consulting editor for the *Journal of Educational Measurement*, and a member of the Committee of Examiners in Aptitude Testing, College Entrance Examination Board. He has written many articles, among them "Fluency Abilities in Preschool Children," "Academic Instruction and Preschool Programs," and "An Academically-Oriented Preschool for Culturally Deprived Children" (with Siegfried Engelmann). Mr. Engelmann (B.A., University of Illinois) is the author of the Cognitive Maturity Test and the Language Concept Mastery Test, both soon to be published, and of the book *Give Your Child a Superior Mind*.

Photo from the book

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preface

A book that prescribes definite teaching procedures and curricula for the preschool education of disadvantaged children is necessarily premature. Nevertheless, we have felt that there is an immediate need for something more than the general precepts and recommendations that now constitute the literature of compensatory preschool education. For the lack of definite guides, preschool teachers across the country have fallen back on what they would like to think are "tried and true" methods of nursery school education. It should be recognized that none of these methods have been tried for very long with disadvantaged children and that none of them have been proved "true" in the sense of accomplishing the objectives of compensatory education.

The methods and curricula set forth in this book have been or are being "tried" in about 14 different classes for disadvantaged children around the country—enough trial, at least, to show that they are feasible. They have been shown "true" to the extent of removing, not merely lessening, the major deficiencies in learning that are characteristic of disadvantaged children.

We wish to acknowledge the valuable contributions of those who worked with us in the establishment and operation of the pilot preschool from which this program emerged—Jean Osborn, Philip Reidford, Margaret Welsh, Louise Herzberg, Ann Bernos, Helen Bereiter, and Therese Engelmann. We are particularly grateful to Mrs. Osborn for her dedication, resourcefulness, understanding, and skill. A number of other individuals and groups helped us in a variety of ways, but we should especially like to acknowledge the generosity of the McKinley Foundation of Champaign, Illinois, in providing space and facilities for conducting the preschool. The research reported herein was supported by the Cooperative Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

C. B.
S. E.

Basic Teaching Strategies

*T*eaching in an academically oriented preschool is a highly skilled, intellectually demanding job, requiring the highest standards of professionalism. There is no use looking around for “wonder” teachers who possess all the requisite skills as natural gifts. Such teachers do not exist. The skills have to be learned, and a reasonably intelligent, open-minded, and determined teacher can learn them.

This chapter presents the basic principles and strategies that are important in teaching all subjects. The remaining chapters present methods applicable to the teaching of specific subjects. There is no intention to rob teachers of their individuality and turn them into carbon copies of one another. The teacher who follows the rules and prescriptions set forth in these chapters will still have ample opportunity to “be herself” and put the stamp of her own personality on her teaching. What is discouraged, however, is a sort of misplaced individualism that is indulged at the expense of the children’s learning. We expect a physician to be an individual, but we do not expect the kind of medicine he prescribes or the size of the incision he makes to vary with his mood. Teaching new concepts to naïve children is often as delicate a task as making an incision. Slight variations can make the difference between successful learning and discouraging confusion. This is not to say that there is only one way to present a concept, any more than there is only one way to perform a surgical operation. But it takes a very sophisticated practitioner to know which variations are optional and which are dangerous.

Because we cannot present all possible ways of teaching concepts effectively, and because for a teacher who is new to intensive academic teaching in the preschool it is difficult enough merely to learn one effective way of performing the variety of tasks that face her, this chapter and the ones following are written in a straightforward “how-to-do-it” manner. It is hoped that the teacher will study and use these chapters as she would a detailed cookbook, recognizing that it is possible to be a very good cook without being an expert in the science of cookery, but that when one is not a thorough master of the science of cookery, it is necessary to stay close to the recipes if one is to avoid failures.

It is sometimes difficult for the beginning teacher to appreciate what

is demanded of her. She is often used to working on the level of "ideas." A teaching demonstration, for her, is a demonstration of an "idea," which she uses by incorporating it into her own style. A good teaching presentation, however, deals in units far smaller and more intricate than "ideas." It deals both in specific modules of information and in specific devices for getting the information across. For this reason, a detailed set of teaching strategies would involve many demonstrations of the interplay between information, pace, discipline, rewards, and drama as they relate to specific curriculum tasks. Although a full account of this kind is beyond the scope of the present book, a sample presentation appears below. It will provide an idea of the size of units that are used by the polished teacher. On the left are the responses of teacher and children; on the right are the teacher's reasons for doing what she does. The reader will note that the teacher is a true clinician. Her responses are premeditated and purposeful. Her presentation is sensitive to the vicissitudes that present themselves during the teaching situation. The task being presented is that of classifying things as weapons or nonweapons.

<i>Presentation</i>	<i>Reasons</i>
<p>TEACHER: [Presents picture of rifle] This is a _____.</p>	<p>She begins with no verbal explanation. Lengthy verbal preambles do not make learning easier or the material more meaningful to naive children. They simply bore the child or entertain him in a passive nonproductive manner.</p>
<p>CHILD B: Gun. TEACHER: Good. It is a gun.</p>	<p>She would have favored the word <i>rifle</i> instead of <i>gun</i>, but since <i>gun</i> is correct and since the response was apparently the product of thinking, she uses <i>gun</i>, and she praises the child.</p>
<p>Let's all say it: This is a gun. This is a gun. Again. This is a gun.</p>	<p>The children seem uninterested. Learning will not proceed smoothly unless the teacher can secure the children's interest. Many motivating devices are possible, but the teacher prefers one that will favor the members of the class who are paying attention.</p>
<p>Let's say it one more time: This is an alligator. CHILD D: It ain't neither. It a <i>gun</i>.</p>	<p>This device would not be recommended if the children had only a tenuous grasp of the concept. The teacher feels reasonably sure, however, that every child in the class knows what a gun is. The task, therefore, is a test of their attention, not their knowledge.</p>

you'll see. That's because he's trying to think big." *The teacher should let the child know that she approves of his approach, even though it sometimes leads to incorrect responses.* Conversely, nonthinking behavior, even if it leads to the correct answer, should be discouraged. This should be done in a positive way. "Did you try hard today? I don't think so. You fooled around a lot and didn't pay attention. But you're a smart boy and you can get it if you try. You come in tomorrow and really work, okay?"

Summary

This chapter dealt with the basic teaching strategies that have application in the preschool for culturally deprived children. The following specific strategies were explained:

1. Work at different levels of difficulty at different times.
2. Adhere to a rigid, repetitive presentation pattern.
3. Use unison responses whenever possible.
4. Never work with a child individually in a study group for more than about 30 seconds.
5. Phrase statements rhythmically.
6. Require children to speak in a loud, clear voice.
7. Do not hurry children or encourage them to talk fast.
8. Clap to accent basic language patterns and conventions.
9. Use questions liberally.
10. Use repetition.
11. Be aware of the cues the child is receiving.
12. Use short explanations.
13. Tailor the explanations and rules to what the child knows.
14. Use lots of examples.
15. Prevent incorrect responses whenever possible.
16. Be completely unambiguous in letting the child know when his response is correct and when it is incorrect.
17. Dramatize the use value of learning whenever possible.
18. Encourage thinking behavior.

Each of these apparently simple rules requires a considerable amount of skill if it is to be executed successfully. This chapter has provided a number of specific suggestions and examples for putting these rules into practice, but the actual skill can only be acquired through disciplined experience. It was pointed out that no teacher possesses these highly specialized skills as a natural gift but that almost any teacher can acquire them if she works at it. It is hoped that this chapter will have convinced the prospective teacher that she has a good deal to learn, regardless of her previous experience, and that there is no mystery surrounding the skills needed to become an effective teacher in an academically oriented preschool.