EDUCATION OF THE CHILD IN URBAN SLUMS: AN OVERVIEW OF FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNING AND RESPONSIVE ACTION THROUGH SOCIAL WORK

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Based on a field action project of collaboration between a statutory organisation and a university affiliated professional programme, the paper demonstrates how effective work can be undertaken in the interest of the most disadvantaged children in slums. It begins with an examination of the realities of slum life for the children, and then goes to discuss their implications for structuring the educational goals, and suggests solutions to problems posed by the system on the disadvantaged learners. The need to develop school enrichment programmes to be initiated by the Social Services Departments in schools is discussed in the final part of the paper.

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Introduction

This paper is based on a field action project, undertaken by the College of Social Work (affiliated to the University of Bombay), in collaboration with the Education Department Municipal Corporation of Greater Bombay. Initially, in 1970, two demonstration projects were commenced in the Colaba and Danda Primary and Upper Primary Municipal Schools encompassing 13 languages in 14 schools and 10,619 children. The project in Colaba commenced with the placement of a field work student who was appointed as social worker in 1971. The project in Danda commenced in 1973 with the placement of a full time social worker. While the first was selected by the College on the basis of certain criteria, the second was the result of the insistence of the school principal who heard about the project and wanted it in his schools. Schools at Danda were similar to those at Colaba on the criteria. Later, the project expanded to 15 additional centres in 1979, located in some of the major slums of the city from South to North Bombay and from North East to North West covering a child population of 80,000 in the most vulnerable groups in the city.

The first two projects were established by the College with grant assistance from non-governmental funding agencies. The project received its major initial support from the then Education Officer, the late Dr. Madhuri Shah, who later became the Chairperson of the University Grants Commission. In 1979, the International year of the Child, Mrs. Kusum Kamat, the then Education Officer, requested the College to help the Department to establish 15 additional centres with grant-in-aid from the Municipal Corporation to the College as she valued the work in these centres and wished to commemorate the International year with a significant activity in the schools. Under the budgetary head of remedial education, it was possible to locate the funds for setting up the project. This was a new phase in partnership between the Municipal Corporation of the second largest metropolis in India and an academic institution offering professional degrees in social work at the bachelor’s and the master’s levels.

The third phase was established when the Education Department of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Bombay took over the full administrative responsibility of the

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project in 1985. Hence, in a span of 15 years, the project established roots in the existing education system in the city which covers more children than the private schools and is, probably, the largest school system in the world. This collaboration between a statutory organisation and a university affiliated professional programme is an example of the effective work in the interest of the most disadvantaged children in slums.

The presentation in this paper is largely based on the experience of the initial project which led to the evolution of the thrust to solve the major problem of educating largely the first generation learners, the context of deprivation and an unsupportive community environment for education. When the project was expanded, the thrust, evolved earlier, was replicated and some additional components added which are also given in the paper. Since much has been written on the issue of wastage and stagnation in education, the focus of this paper is on action rather than only on the analysis of the problem.

1. The paper will identify the frame of reference on which the educational system is ordinarily based; the premises which have their roots in an era when education was confined mostly to those whose families had a history of education and the wherewithal to educate the child. It examines the social realities of the life of the urban child in lower income families, mainly residing in slums or zoppadpattis (hutments and squatter colonies), and the services to respond to these realities.

2. Next, the focus is on the implications of these background factors on structuring educational goals.

3. Further, the system of education and its effects on the disadvantaged learner are examined and some solutions suggested to the problems.

4. Lastly, there is an examination of the need to develop school enrichment programmes through the activities of the Social Services Departments in these schools, and the utilisation of the resources of other organisations.

The Dimensions of the Problem

It is commonly recognised and accepted that education is a major requirement for development. Its role in the development of human resources can be hardly underestimated. However, it is not education per se, but the relevance of that education to development which is significant for the achievement of our national goals. Secondly, human resource development can only be linked to economic development when the developmental model is specifically designed to raise the levels of those in the lower economic strata of our population, and is not deflected towards providing advantages for those who can capture, for themselves, the fruits of development. Hence, the model and strategy employed for both education and socio-economic development are interlinked to ensure the achievement of national goals.

India has some of the lowest literary rates in the world with only 30 per cent of adult literacy. Forty-three years after independence, we still have a long way to travel. Unfortunately, this low literacy rate is not only because of a lack of educational facilities. It is claimed today that 90 per cent of the child population, in the age group 6 to 11, is enrolled in primary schools, and 50 per cent in the 11 to 14 age group in upper
primary middle schools. Part of this large figure is due to over-reporting as the reimbursement from government grants to local bodies is based on the number of children enrolled.\(^1\) However, it has also been established by official statistics, that, of every 100 children who enter class I, only 40 children will complete class IV and, possibly, enter class V. Only 20 to 25 children will survive into class VIII. The wastage, therefore, from classes I to V is as high as 60 per cent. It is an established fact that a child, to be literate and to retain his literacy, must complete at least four years of school.\(^2\) Most of those children who drop out earlier, will reach adulthood as illiterates. The wastage of financial outlay on children, who were in the school system but subsequently dropped out and lapsed into illiteracy, runs into several million rupees. It would be an important exercise to link the survey of the total number of dropouts in the first three years of school to the financial resources wasted by linking to the cost invested per child in the school system. Larger outlays may only lead to greater wastage of resources unless education is appropriately designed for utilisation by children from the disadvantaged groups.

We are well aware that the level of educational achievement is closely linked to economic achievement, family planning, and parenthood which facilitates the development of the next generation for achievement at levels higher than those of their parents and grandparents. Provided that it is consciously and appropriately built into it, it can also ensure an enlightened citizenry capable of participating in the nation's achievement of its goals—a population which is conscious of its rights as well as its responsibilities in obtaining a higher quality of life, equality and social justice. Recognising that a majority of our children, presently, may not go beyond classes IV or VII, we need to build in the necessary preparation for life roles—economic, familial, and as participant in the community's well-being and advancement.

The Reasons for the lack of Fit Between the Design of the Educational System and the Social Realities of the Child in the Urban Slums

The educational system was designed, and is still largely a legacy of our colonial past. It is borrowed from the social realities of the designers of education who were themselves middle class and, frequently, western oriented. Their social realities are quite different from those of the large masses of our populations—be they rural or urban—who live in poverty. The premises on which our educational system is built are premises of advantaged social groups and do not apply to the disadvantaged. Let us examine them. At the outset, it is necessary to recognise that the educational system is based on the premise that motivation for education is a primary motivation. To be a student is accepted as the social role of childhood. It is also accepted that this role will be supported by parental motivation, capacity, and opportunity. We may examine these premises in detail on which education is based.

1. **The basic premise is that motivation for education is a primary motivation.** This primary motivation is based on two premises:

   (a) Parents have at least some history of education, have experienced the worth of education, are willing to undergo immense personal sacrifice, actively reinforce in the child the need for education, and have some skills to help the child utilise the educational opportunity through assisting the child in his homework and paying visits to the teachers in the school.
Parents have the necessary supports to free children for returns that appear somewhat remote and futuristic.

Both these premises do not operate for a majority of our children in India. In a study (Bhide, 1973), undertaken in the Colaba Municipal Schools, of 25 good performers (placed in the first few ranks) and an equal number of dropouts, it was found that among fathers of dropouts there were 20 who were illiterate, 2 had primary education and 3 had achieved upper primary level, while, among the fathers of good performers only 8 were illiterate, 10 had completed primary school, 4 had achieved up to the upper primary level and 3 had achieved up to secondary school. The differences are immediately apparent. Parents, whose present life circumstances require tremendous energy and effort, can invest very little in the future. The present predominates over the future and expectations of future rewards, Education may be a value but it is of a lower order of priorities because of life's competing demands. In our comparative study of learners (good performers and dropouts), it was found that a majority of parents of dropouts, who were also illiterate and in low paying jobs, had never considered the job their child should take. Parents of good performers, who were more educated and in better paid jobs, had "service" as their ideal and motivated their child to a distant goal.

The educational system provides alternative choices in role achievement, and presumes that such choice is the basic motivation for education. Such alternative choices do not exist for the child in the urban slum. He rarely sees anyone who plays an occupational role to which he can aspire as an adult. In the aforementioned study on learners, it was found that the location of the child's home had considerable impact on his achievement. Children who may be economically poorer, but resided in middle class communities, or in establishments for families of defence personnel (mostly children of domestic help), and who had opportunity to perceive successful role models, were better learners. Whenever our school children put up a play which they had written and produced, mainly two role models prevailed—those of a policemen and teacher. Only sometimes a doctor appeared. This shows how few models they have to which they can aspire. Many of the dropouts have older siblings who are also dropouts and most of their friends are also dropouts. Many children in these communities cannot even name someone who has completed his SSC.

The educational system presumes that education is the major work of children and the family can provide the necessary supports to achieve it. However, this premise does not operate in low income families. There is no assurance of supports in the environment to nurture education. Lack of electricity in many homes, overcrowding and noise, and the steady appearance of cheap transistor, TVs and now, Videos, make it impossible to study. Men quarrelling under the influence of alcohol, women quarrelling at the common taps, quarrels between husband and wife or between neighbours, make studying an impossible task. The research on learners has shown that, among dropouts, 19 out of 25 had no electricity at home and 10 had no place to study. This was true of good performers in the case of only 2 who had no electricity and 8 who had no place to study. Only 2 of the dropouts said they had no problems connected with the positive conditions required for study while among good performers as many as 14 had no such problems.
Homework is impossible under such severely limiting conditions and with low literacy of parents who cannot guide their children. What the child is expected to do he must complete during the span of the school hours or time and means must be additionally provided for individual study through study centres supervised by teachers. This is one of the more popular programmes after school provided by the project. The child is expected to give a token fee but exceptions are made for needy cases. We found that a token fee made parents and child equally responsible for attendance. A survey showed that 80 per cent of these children passed their final examinations.

The book bank is another scheme to support the child to remain in the educational system. The books were loaned and a small rental fee charged to develop participation and responsibility in the child and his parents. Our assessment shows that a majority of books were returned in good condition. A very small number were lost or required to be rebound. Greater wastage is caused by change in text books. The stock of books increases considerably as books are only loaned, and the number of children benefitting can increase without much addition in financial outlay. The scheme was discontinued when the Department introduced free supply of text books.

However, it is our experience that not all children in the school need such help. Children who come to our schools are also from families of shopkeepers, tailors, fruit and vegetable merchants, and fishermen who have stable earnings. With scarce resources, it is best to concentrate on the most needy children and not universalise such schemes. A majority of children who were on this scheme passed the examinations—the rate was around 80 per cent. Failure, or irregular attendance, due to lack of books or uniforms, was reduced, with the introduction of these schemes.

A limited input of financial sponsorship of children was another scheme which helped children to remain in school, who would have otherwise dropped out, or performed marginally due to constraints imposed by economic stress resulting from low income, unemployment of father, or alcoholism and irregular earnings of the father.

Economic level is clearly associated with performance. In our comparative study of learners, it was found that good performers had fathers who were not only slightly more educated, but held white collar jobs (18 out of 25) and the per capita income was over Rs. 40 (in 1973) for 14 out of 25 families. Only 9 families had that income where dropouts were concerned and a majority were children of mill workers, labourers and kolis. One father of a dropout was unemployed. We note, therefore, that the municipal schools do have families that are in relatively better circumstances, and it is these children who also show better academic performance. Selective application of supportive services is required. Where eligible, token payment should be expected as it increases self-worth and a feeling of participation. It also generates a marginally additional income to maintain some aspects of the programme.

4. The child is free to be involved in learning when his other primary needs are met. This is taken for granted in middle class learners. Children in our classes are malnourished. They suffer from physical debility. They live in slums where infections cause recurring illness, mainly intestinal and respiratory. Besides loss of attendance, the child becomes further debilitated.
In an experimental scheme started through the initiative and sponsorship of a professional women's organisation, the Altrusa Club, supplemental nutrition was provided to selected under-nourished primary school children. The diet consisted of 300 grams of calories and 6 ounces of protein. In 1973, this meal cost 35 paise and represented the deficit between the child's nutritional needs and his actual intake in his own home. A medical examination preceded the enrolment of the child and the parameters were monitored periodically. The mothers were also interviewed for the child's food patterns at home and explained about the nutrition programme as a nutritional supplement. The positive effects of this feeding programme were reported by the teachers who stated that the children were more alert and participated actively in class instead of sleeping. Subsequently, the scheme was extended to selected malnourished children in other schools. The preparation was done by some mothers who were paid for the work and managed feeding as well as washing up after the meal. Unless the family environment can provide the necessary supports, and where it has limitations, the school makes up the deficits, the child is least likely to benefit from a single service delivery approach, where education is the exclusive service of the school, more suited to the child in the middle classes.

5. Admission, daily schedule and regularity in attendance are assured in an educational programme. Joining the school at the appropriate time at the beginning of the academic year, regularity in attendance, and providing opportunity for the child to have uninterrupted learning, are presumed in families of the middle class. Families with no history of education do not recognise that learning implies continuity and sequence for integration, which is a basic principle in learning. Children are admitted by the Corporation for several months after school opens to assure that they do not lose a year. However, there is no concomitant provision to see that they make up the portion missed. These children start with a handicap which the parents with low educational levels cannot remedy. As a result, these children have to lose a year, in any case, as they fail. This creates a low self-image which has its negative persistent effects.

Working parents cannot assure that their children will go regularly to school. These children may oversleep, or for those in the afternoon shifts, are so engrossed in play that they miss the time, or they are tempted to stay away. Parents also lack skill in taking measures such as utilising rewards, encouragement, and contacting the teacher if the child is reluctant to go to school. In our research we found that a majority of illiterate parents used punishment if child did not go to school, a few tried to send him back and none contacted the teacher. Most of these parents lacked skills in dealing with the educational system. If they had a sudden need to go to their village, they left with the family, interrupting their children's education. Reasons usually given were work connected with their land, illness of someone in the village, ceremonies to be performed, or husband's leave. Fishermen's sons accompanied their fathers on the boat for 2 or 3 days, thus missing school. There is no programmed learning for them to make up the portion they have missed. In addition, they are kept at home to do the housework if someone is ill, such as the mother. Whoever is older is affected irrespective of sex.

Hence, education has to compete with and receive a lower order of priorities among competing needs. Besides the problem of shifting around created by
ties with the village, an additional problem is the demolition of huts and relocations in the middle of the school year. Our city planners have little recognition that children in slums also go to school and relocation causes problems of continuity for the child in school. Either the schools in the new location are not existing prior to the shift of the population in a new relocation sight, or, they are too full due to successive migrations of groups being relocated and the lack of coordination between the various departments.

6. The educational system also presumes that the major demand at that time in life is to study and the major role of childhood is to be a student. This need has secondary importance where both parents work and someone has to take care of younger siblings. This problem is further aggravated by the shift system. We find that older siblings, attending morning shift, have to leave school because they have younger children at home who are out of school at that time. One solution tried was to split the divisions fully from primary to middle school so that all the children of a family can be accommodated in one shift. This would stem, at least, some of the wastage occurring without the major costs required in providing day care services for such primary school children.

Some children need to earn. Generally, parents do not take the child out of school unless he is not doing well in school. The earning substantially increases the family's resources. A child who earns Rs. 100/- augments by one-third the earnings of a father who earns Rs. 300/- Hence, families need many inputs if the child is to benefit from the educational system.

**Reaching the Parents through the Child**

One of the means utilised was to have parents' meetings, class by class, where the teacher discussed the content of what is to be learnt, need for parents to send children to school regularly and punctually, how to encourage children and increase their motivation to learn. The social worker assisted in interpreting the parent's needs to the teacher and vice versa. If nutrition was given to the children, it was re-inforced through mothers' meetings on the preparation of low cost diets of high protein and vitamin value, health of children, family planning and consumer guidance. Parents were also helped in crises such as sudden death, hunger due to unemployment, problems and tensions resulting from marital conflict, the placement of children in foster care, the placement of children on sponsorship to prevent dropout, helping parents accept medical treatment for their children as resistance existed due to superstition and ignorance e.g. need for spectacles or hearing aid, and follow-up of the suspected T. B. and leprosy cases. Home visits made the social worker a familiar figure in the community. For instance, when the worker visited the community, adults began to point out the family where a child had stopped going to school. The message that the school was concerned about dropouts was beginning to be appreciated by the community.

The community itself can be an important means of helping the child and his family. Since parents do not have the skills to motivate their children, some programmes in the community were instituted as a means to promote education. One community conducted essay competitions, and gave awards to children who stood first in their respective classes in whichever school they attended. This brings out talent, and also
provides some incentives and rewards, highlighting the importance which the community gives to education. Another community was helped to start a school for small children who cannot travel the distance of several bus-stops to reach the school at Colaba. Several communities were helped to initiate balwadies.

The increase in contacts with the school, which was fostered by the social worker's activities, reduced the fear of being called to school and being told of the child's poor performance. Parents began to come to school more readily as they were invited for a variety of activities and not only to be told about the poor performance of the child. Parents also sought out the social worker's help on their own. Such self-referrals, and referrals by other parents, who had been helped, increased.

The Educational System and the Child From the Urban Slum—Goals of Education

It is not clear whether the goals of education, for as varied a child population as in urban areas, has received adequate attention. As stated by Surabhi Patel in *Education of Children From Urban Slums*,

...the ideal of equal educational opportunity as identical educational programmes, without any regard for the developmental level, needs and concerns of the slum children has run amuck and disturbed the whole scheme of things. A serious doubt arises as to the advisability of having similar goals for the education of children from very unequal and dissimilar backgrounds. The goals will not only be different in certain ways, but will also have different emphases and priorities.  

The result of this lack of recognition is that education is clearly structured with the university as the goal. There are no facilities for ladder type learning so that students are prepared with specific employable skills at several terminal points but can also proceed, if they wish, to the next step in the ladder. The students with their built-in handicaps, which have never been the focus of the system, come out of the system with poor capacity to compete with the middle classes whose children *came* from school systems which prepare them better for the white collar, service oriented occupations, and whose families can re-inforce this learning. Neither, therefore, do they have work skills, nor do they have adequate preparation, or supports, to continue to university education. The result is a high rate of dropouts, or stagnation, or reaching termination points without the hope of achieving suitable economic rewards. It lowers the self-concept, and gives them little confidence in the system which limits their future.

A publication of the Ministry of Education states that "in any well designed national system of education, secondary education must have two specific objectives: (1) to prepare a student for the University, or (2) to become terminal and prepare a student for some vocation in life".

What about primary education? Should it also not have multiple goals? Should it always be designed for achieving secondary education? Could both goals receive more equal emphasis so as to provide work skills but at the same time leave the door open for those who will go for higher education? Should a large majority in India (85 per cent will dropout by Std. VIM) suffer because education is designed for
15 per cent who will go beyond Class VIII and only a handful beyond school to the University? It appears that we lack priorities in our system of education, and particularly in our concept of mass education.

Ladder learning, multiple termination points and job skills (not only work experience) have to be given more focus if we wish to gear learning to social and economic developmental goals rather than vague goals of making everyone "educated" to our middle class, white collar, preconceived notions of achievement and life goals. We are faced with this problem in our day to day work in the schools. What is the opportunity for the boy who finishes SSC? What have we done to prepare a girl in a fishing community for her life role when she drops out in Std. VII to sell fish in the market? These problems nag us every day. For instance, in what way have we improved fishing techniques for those families where children participate in this occupation? Why is it not a necessary aspect of the school curriculum in a fishing community, or agriculture in a farming community?

The Point of Entry in the Educational System of the Child From Urban Slums: Some Problems and Solutions

Problems, specifically in four areas of education, have been observed as not relating adequately to the learning needs of those youngsters who come with built-in social handicaps for education as it is currently designed.

a. The manner in which the school programme must be designed as a positive experience and one related to his needs.

b. Methods of teaching suited to learning needs particularly of the children from urban slums.

c. The relationship of content to actual life experience.

d. Methods of evaluation based on encouraging success and achievement rather than leading to greater possibilities of failure.

Let us take each one separately. The child comes from a family, which, though affectionate, has little time available to its adults to promote the child’s individuality, and a feeling of being important, by placing the child as its central concern. Unfortunately, the school re-inforces this message because schools and class-rooms are large. When young children in Classes I, II or III drop out early in the year, teachers cannot even remember their faces, or associate the name with the face. In studying dropouts, it was found that the child becomes faceless for the teacher especially when he/she drops out early and there is no distinguishing characteristic by which he/she can be remembered. It is impossible even to identify the child’s special assets and aptitudes in such a situation. A few children stand out and get recognition. The rest are just a crowd. If a teacher is absent, the class swells to 100 to 120 as two classes are joined. The children are crowded on benches and the children sitting at the end of the benches may feel insecure as they may fall off the edges. Children get the message that teaching and learning are not designed for them. They have been heard to remark that they do not learn anything where such classes are joined and so they plan to stay out of school till the teacher returns. There is no provision for substitute teachers,
especially attached to large schools, where someone is bound to be absent everyday. Such substitute teachers, attached to the ward office, and on call, could be a very valuable resource.

Every educationist knows, and every education commission has remarked, that 30 is an optimal size for teaching. The children who need most attention and individualisation, get the least. That class size is related to performance is borne out by our experience. The Tamil and Kannada language schools in Colaba were small. The teachers and children had a close and affectionate relationship. Although the children came from families of pavement dwellers, and very low income earners, there was a low dropout rate because of the attention received, making coming to school worthwhile for the child and the parents.

A suggestion never tried was that, for every two divisions, there be one extra teacher. This teacher would take half the number of children from two divisions, making one class size of 50 to 60 for subjects where larger class size would have less consequences. Then each class teacher would be left with 25 to 30 children, for special classes requiring individual attention, such as reading, writing and number work. This pattern would facilitate greater attention from the teacher. If the day's programme was well scheduled, into 8 parts, each class-teacher would have 2 periods for a group of 25 to 30 children, and each group would get at least 2 periods a day for such individual attention.

Another method which could be used as alternative to, or supplement to the above-mentioned, especially in primary school, is to conduct activities by breaking up the 60 children into small groups so that each group is engaged in a different activity. This would make it possible for the teacher to give attention to a group that requires more help, or facilitate individual attention for activities such as reading or number work by concentrating on a few children at a time. Children can help each other in promoting learning. Also less equipment is required of a type as each group is engaged in a different activity. This experiment is described below.

Classes are not suitably organised for entry of five year olds. They are young, not used to being still, and cooped up in one room from 1.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. Desks and benches are alien ways of sitting as their home has no furniture. Text books, recitation, and copying from the board, are not stimulating enough. They need a class-room which gives freedom of movement. The existing desks should be used for new schools being opened. Children should have individual "durries" and "chowkies" which can be easily stacked when space is required for games and songs win action and movement. Children should be able to move from one activity to another. In the project schools, the physical arrangements were modified. After some initial resistance from a few parents, the new physical set-up of the class-room was found to be more suitable. The teachers could see all the children and none of them feared the child falling and hurting his head on the furniture. Besides the child getting freedom of movement, the teacher could move easily to each child. The children no longer fell asleep and were not huddled together when lack of space resulted in more children sharing fewer benches.

The programme was also suitably changed to be more activity oriented. The lower portion of the walls were painted black in oil paint so the whole length was used for children to draw. The children were increasingly being grouped for activities. There was less dependence on text books and more use of educational aids which the
child could handle such as flash cards, matching pictures with words, using alphabet cut-outs, and doing number work on his/her own. The teachers began learning to use the black-board less and promoting self-learning in children through programmed type of hand-made materials. Less children remained absent, less children stayed away after break, and there was little dropout. The programme began to show its value. Ultimately, the experiment was replicated in many schools. A follow up study of teachers trained in these techniques in the project schools showed that, even when transferred to other schools, they carried with them and used the materials they themselves had made in the project schools and other teachers in the school also began to emulate them. However, this modification in the classroom structure would have greater pay-off only when our teachers have greater preparation for this pattern of education and adequate teaching materials are available. Support is also necessary from the education inspectors. These deficits can be remedied only slowly, and effectiveness can only be measured then, in relation to the child’s performance, wastage and stagnation.

At the entry point, we have found wastage to be the highest in the primary school. Whereas there may be 8 divisions in Class I, there will be 6 in Class II. We need to make school a more attractive activity for the children. The teachers need to be warm, affectionate and mother substitutes especially for young children. They are usually warm, affectionate and responsive children. Young children have sometimes expressed their fear of male teachers in Class I, and especially the presence of a stick or a ruler even if it is not used or utilized lightly. The teacher who cannot control children through a relationship, is not suitable, especially for very young children.

The content of what is learnt is as significant as the method. What is "taught" is not always "caught". The introduction of a child to school is a new experience. He/she must begin, therefore, at least with what is familiar to in his/her audio-visual and ideational experience. The first vocabulary used should be local and idiomatic. Each school should build up this vocabulary and begin through it. Pictures should illustrate what is within the immediate experience. It is an important educational principle to begin with what is known and then to proceed to the unknown; begin from the concrete and then proceed to the abstract. Standard text books cannot achieve this as the social environment of various groups of children is different. One of our social workers and social work students in training, had a short session with a group of Class II children. They presented the primer which the children had already studied in Class I, and which presumably, they knew. Here is what happened. (It is an illustration of the inadequacy of the primer and not the teacher who had to use it.)

Some pictures were shown and the children were asked to say what they were. A man with a sheaf of corn on his shoulders was recognised as the man who sells brooms! The deer became a goat, the duck became a hen. These are objects a child in a slum had seen. The lotus was recognised as a flower but they said it grew on a mountain and could not give the name. The one picture they easily recognised was Mahatma Gandhi. The social worker and the student social workers were pleased. They asked who he was. There was a dead silence. Then a little girl piped up and said it was the old man who lived down her lane but now he had gone to his village! We also find that, if a picture was shown, they could repeat the text by rote, but, if the picture is blocked out and a word only is shown they cannot recognise it. The lesson is learnt by rote through the auditory senses but reading achievement is expected prematurely and, therefore, fails to occur. There is no visual recognition of the word. These are urban
children from slums. They have had a severely restricted social experience. Until they visit the zoo, what is the use of talking about deer and ducks? Why not talk of the tailor, the madari or khelwala, the balloon man, the bus driver, the truck? These are the child's everyday experiences. Many of them have been born here and have never been to a village. The pictures in their texts show a house with drawing room, dining room and bedrooms when they live in zopdis and chawls in overcrowded all-purpose spaces. Most Class I children have journeyed so little out of the slum, that they have only seen what they see there.

The children have no preparation for school. Their vocabulary is restricted to everyday talk to meet daily needs. They have no concept development. Yet, the introduction to Class I neglects initial development of vocabulary and concepts, as emphasis is very early on writing and copying from the black-board. I once went into a Class I and saw the children copying a very complex sentence. Most of the children could not read it. Only 7 and 8 year olds, who had previously dropped out, and returned to school, could read.

The age at admission is five." Increasingly, working parents are anxious to admit their children so they do not delay entry as they did previously. The age and stage of development requires a lowering of educational demands for this class, as much as the lack of preparedness for school entry due to the educational limitations of their parents. Play-way and activity oriented programmes are also essential to meet the developmental needs of this age group. Most of them have had no previous experience in balwadis or nurseries which provide habit formation, a sense of disciplined activity and focusing attention on tasks. All these behaviours have to be developed. The first year of school is, therefore, learning readiness and should be designed to achieve this goal. At present, unfortunately, it is syllabus rather than learner oriented. The teacher is in such fear of not completing the syllabus that the majority of Class I children have not even grasped half the year's syllabus although the teacher's diary shows her diligence in completing the same. Ask any Class II teacher and she will tell you the problems she must consequently face. The problem is passed on from class to class till, ultimately, the child fails or drops out of the system in despair as he really knows he is not learning, and has no gratification at school or in the reprimands of his parents.

It is suggested that the first three grades be treated as one stage of learning. The initial period should allow for a very slow start and only gradually acceleration may take place once foundations are laid. This means that, instead of the usual equal teaching units, there will be initially longer ones in which less content and more time is given. Secondly, instead of texts, teaching materials should be designed, which are so varied that a group of materials may be selected by the school according to the child's environment. For instance, two out of seventeen schools have fishing communities and domestic help working in nearby homes. In some communities children are from homes of mill workers, while others have craftsman such as cobblers. Appropriate visual material could be selected on the basis of what the child knows. Since it is not all bound in a text book, the principal and teachers can appropriately select the materials related to the child's environment, supported by the education inspector.

To sum up, we have been saying so far, that the emphasis should be progressively on:

a. Development of behaviour patterns suitable to promote learning and a classroom atmosphere conducive to such development, stimulation and interest.
b. Development of vocabulary through visual means, songs, walks outside the school with the teacher pointing to objects around.

c. Mastery over reading through activity oriented techniques and learning to use writing tools through crayons, colours, drawing.

d. Beginning writing skills and number work.

As most children are ill-prepared for school, and entering a large class in a large school, can be a frightening experience to a small child of five, they should be allowed to enter school later everyday, and leave earlier, than older children. They also require a school preparation programme as most of these children have no balwadi experience or family preparation. It is expensive to have balwadis and nurseries. We have as many as 400 children entering in a single year in one Marathi medium school alone. The expense would be considerable to develop preschool programmes. Therefore, a school preparation programme was introduced which started in the last week of April, when the rest of the school closed down, and ended one week prior to re-opening of school. The Education Department introduced it in all project schools and some non-project schools also. Its duration is about six weeks. Teachers trained in nursery school techniques should be preferred. They give the child the necessary habit and behaviour training as well as introduce him to some learning of concepts such as picture recognition, colour recognition and number recognition. The emphasis is to provide a head-start as well as stimulate the child's curiosity and interest for school. The design of experiences give the child the notion that school is a pleasant experience to be positively anticipated.

Assessment of this scheme was positive on the impact it had for adjustment to school and readiness for learning. Children who had benefited before entry in Class I wanted to be included the next year even after completing Class II. Lastly, as an aspect of the system of education for the disadvantaged learner, the scheme of evaluation requires to be assessed. Education in India presupposes evaluation to be a means of elimination instead of a feedback for improvement. There is a heavy loss at each stage of education and it particularly hits hardest the disadvantaged children, who most need education for upward mobility. The approach utilised needs reform. Tests which are periodic, assessment of ongoing work, and verbal as well as written tests are required. Young children in Classes I and II need verbal instruction and clarification to supplement the written instructions in the question papers. In fact, the vocabulary utilized for giving instructions in the question papers in Classes I and II, is beyond the capacity of the child at that level. Teachers need to work with their officers in each school and ward, to develop suitable means to evaluate children, and to delink evaluation of children from the evaluation of the teacher.

The Teacher And The Student From the Urban Slum

The teachers are important means to achieve educational goals. How teachers perceive children is very important. Many teachers show deep concern for the disadvantaged child. Some of them give freely of their time and talent for them. However, a few teachers also have less positive attitudes. They regard these children as domestic help. In the past, they have been known to send them for errands, including bringing rations for them, at the time the child should be in school. Some teachers have been known to spend time conversing with neighbouring
class teachers in the corridor. A few use physical punishment. Children are sensitive. They develop a poor self-image when treated in this manner and verbalize their teachers’ lack of interest in teaching them. They lose interest, then, in the school. Although there are fewer teachers of this type, they can do irreparable damage to the child and create problems for many other teachers with a very positive outlook towards the child, and to whom the children can become deeply attached.

On the other hand, the teachers do feel a lack of gratification and stimulation, when they utilise the existing content or methods of teaching, which do not bring about the desired response in the children. They are evaluated by means which link child's performance to theirs and thus puts them under pressure in a situation, where the child's poor response is due to the lack of fit between the system and the child's social realities.

Supervision of teachers should be seen as a staff development function, an additional source the teacher can utilise for his/her own growth and better service to the children. Instead, it sometimes remains as an administrative function. The teacher's creativity should be rewarded. Recognition techniques should be established. For instance, teachers' awards can be instituted for the preparation of teaching materials and text books. With their day to day experiences, a volume of such material, relevant to the children they teach, can be built up. Exhibition of such work at the ward level and the selection of the best exhibits, at the ward and city levels, should be encouraged. The Social Services Department organised such an exhibition of teaching aids for the ward schools, which gave the school considerable recognition.

The social worker also works directly with the teachers. An area in which they have been most benefited is understanding the child's developmental needs and the types of problems they must learn to recognise. The teachers in the project schools became alert to the child's needs such as marginal hearing or visual loss, need for special nutritional supplements for children returning after a long illness, speech disorders which they used to think are automatically cured in adolescence, problems of passive and withdrawn children and not only the acting out ones. They were more alert to those not doing well academically, and recognised emotional factors and family problems which could impede the child's performance over and beyond the socio-economic ones. They now consider the dropout as a problem, which they did not do before, as he was seen as no longer there to trouble them. Initially, they could not understand why a child, who chooses to drop out, should be reached as it swelled the class size.

Referrals were made within a stipulated period of the child's absence from school. They began to accept the approach of understanding and concern rather than punishment and reprimand. They felt the need for a teacher-social worker team approach. Sometimes, teachers sought personal help, for their own problems, from the social workers.

School Enrichment Programmes for Older Children Through the Activities of the School Social Workers

The emphasis, so far, was to discuss some problems relating to the education of the child at the point of entry. The problems of relevance increase, as the child progresses in the system, because he/she needs education which has some
applicability to the contextual social realities. These include the possibilities of earning while learning, accommodating domestic responsibilities and care of siblings to the school programme, as well as after school activities. For instance, if the schedule for water supply to the community coincides with the evening study centre and recreation programme, it affects the utilisation of the service by those who have this responsibility in the family. Some programmes for older children are discussed below.

**Family and Vocation**

In middle and secondary schools, there is a need to enrich school programmes with ones which have meaning in their personal lives. For instance, population and family life education evoke great interest, especially as they are handled by social workers who have special skills to relate to the child's milieu and to stimulate group discussion and problem-solving around the problems relating to their family and the community in which they live. Experience in organizing vocational guidance programmes has been similar, since, social workers seem adapt at locating a variety of resources, and bringing in persons who can speak to the children, or, in arranging visits for them.

**Enrichment of Learning Experiences**

Municipal schools lack science equipment for experiments, although science is a required subject. A science project focused on utilising college laboratory facilities, and interested science students of N.S.S. in sharing their knowledge with secondary school students. Once a week, each division visited the college, accompanied by the science teacher. The laboratory experiments were arranged by the demonstrators and the N.S.S. students, who work with the children. The programme highlights three things.

1. Advantaged students take responsibility to share their knowledge with those who are more disadvantaged than them.
2. Existing well equipped laboratory facilities are utilised, obviating the necessity to spend additional resources in the school.
3. The science teacher is exposed to a qualitatively good experience which he/she can then reinforce by practice and in the teaching in the classroom.

Assessment of this scheme showed that the children were confident in a subject which had often troubled them the most (third largest subject failures were in science) and a majority secured higher marks in this subject, than on an average, in other subjects, in the S.S.C. examinations. Municipal secondary schools could arrange to have such a programme with colleges in their neighbourhood.

**Social Service Syllabus**

The social service syllabus for secondary schools is an ideal means for developing an awareness of the causes of the problems which these children face in their social reality, and moving them from being victims to actors and reactors in their environment. The social worker, and a student social worker working through the teacher responsible for this programme, developed a series of exercises to develop their sensitivity to
themselves and others, to begin identifying problems such as unemployment and their causes, and to develop an activity in which they could help others, for instance, a visit and entertainment for children in the paediatric ward of a general hospital. In another exercise, the students went on a camp to a fishing community in the north-western extreme suburb of the city and undertook a survey of dropouts from the Municipal Primary School and the causes of dropout.

**Talents, Creativity and Broadening Social Experiences**

Development of talents and creativity is another area that needs to be emphasized. We have found a gold mine of talent and creativity in the children from writing, directing and acting in plays, to cooking and attractive ways of serving a dish, painting, dance and other forms of self-expression. Except for those few who participate in inter-school competitions, most children never have this opportunity in the Corporation schools. Through cultural programmes and day camps, held during vacations, and vacation play centre activities, such experiences were encouraged. These activities emphasized self-expression and child's creativity rather than mastery of a skill.

**Leadership Development and Vocational Training**

As leadership emerged through these activities, children were trained to become organisers. Workshops for leadership training were held. Anand Mela (fun fair) was another activity which, we found, provided opportunity for planning, organisation, giving of oneself, as well as fun to children who, otherwise, would never have this opportunity which is mainly available commercially or for fund raising. A large number of children can participate in this activity as it is a school based programme by and for the children.

Providing work experience needs to be explored. There are many possibilities, we can name a few.

1. Associate secondary school children as teacher's help in Classes I, II and III. This would not only interest some children in taking teaching as a career, but would relieve the teacher to give more individual attention, and assistance in creating teaching materials.

2. Develop workshops which take care of schools' supplies and needs, especially the bulk ones, such as carpentry for school furniture, doors and windows, chalk making, sewing uniforms and school bags, book-binding, wiring and electrical work and plumbing, chappal making and repairing, making snacks and running a canteen and cooperative store for supplies.

Developing workshops related to use in the community such as stove repairing, cycle repairs, soap making and tailoring is another possibility. In one school watch repairing was started. Associating organisations such as the Shramik Vidyapeeth, can be one way to create the necessary infrastructure for such workshops. Skilled workers in the community can also be utilised as trainers.

The older children should learn managements skills such as purchase, accounts, reporting, petty cash, sales, working out costs of saleable articles, and so on. Association in clerical work and typing may be another category of administrative experience.
National Integration

Since one Social Services Department in the schools serves several language mediums, activities must cut across the schools, so that, children are brought together in closer working relationship. Evening recreation programmes, May vacation play centres, day camps, cultural programmes, group activities conducted by student social workers, all aim at creating this integration. Co-operative activities between schools were, emphasized, rather than competitive ones, in order to promote understanding of others and remove social prejudice with which the children come to the school from their families and communities. National integration has to be a reality through action and not through lessons in the curriculum. Competitions between schools only reinforced traditional stereo-types about communal groups with respect to winners and losers. Hence, emphasis was on activities cutting across schools.

Individualising the Child In Mass Education Programme

Individual work with children showing problems in the class-room, has been one way to assist the child whose behaviour is a reflection of familial tensions. Some children need medical attention. Teachers refer children who have not come to school for 10 days. Timely medical referrals have been made because of these visits. However, the major work has been to bring back the potential dropout to school before it is too late, and he has missed much of classes. A check done by us, in one year, showed that, when personally contacted, 75 per cent of the children returned to school. When, not contacted, only 25 per cent returned spontaneously. Such visits identify other problems requiring the attention of the social workers. The children come to understand that the school cares and, gradually, learn not to dropout easily from the school. The parents also realise that the school comes after the child if he/she does not attend. Children and adults in the community also recognise the social worker and assist them in their task.

Dropouts and Children who never went to School

Lastly, we feel the need to focus on the dropout who is overage to return to school, but wants to improve himself/herself, as well as the child who never went to school and is not overage. These are children between 10 to 18 years. They require a compressed programme of learning utilising non-formal techniques and vocational skills. The Education Department started a non-formal education for such children in which the social workers identified the children and helped the teachers develop a suitable programme. Some of these classes were held in the school and some were even held in the community nearer to the homes of the dropouts.

School buildings in areas, which have become commercial, and where the child population has decreased, could be utilised. Also, these programmes could be held in the evenings in the usual school buildings. They will be particularly useful to children who also work as domestic help, hotel boys, and those in odd jobs. A full programme of vocational training needs to be introduced, parallel to the night schools, for such children, when the physical plant remains otherwise unused.
Raising Resources

The Social Services Departments in these projects are a reality because of the assistance of numerous organisations. The support is through providing the money for various programmes. Organisations adopt specific schemes such as book-bank, uniforms, sponsorship and nutrition. Mass medical check-up is provided by N.S.S. interns, and their professors, in the medical colleges. N.S.S. students in science colleges provide the laboratory experience. Other N.S.S. students adopt the day camp project, school sports or the programme of home visits to bring back dropouts to school. Industries give their consumer products as prizes. Local business is made aware of the activities and is utilised for food snacks on picnics or prizes for sports. Community leaders and youth have formed a School Aid Committee. The older students are a volunteer corp. Without such utilisation of people and resources, the tasks could never be accomplished.

Reaching the Community

It was essential that a school, located in the vicinity of a slum community, must make bridges with it and not only with the community of parents. Initially, the relationship was observed to be an uneasy one between the school and the community. Thus, in some communities, school furniture was vandalised or teenage dropouts hung around the school and passed remarks on young female teachers. Around some schools, there was often human excreta because they provided secluded places in the early hours of the day. Other schools had adjacent plots used as community refuse dumps, so that the children had no place to play. As noted earlier, the community also needed to take up activities which placed importance on education, such as rewarding children who fared well in school performance, or holding essay, debate and poetry recitation competitions. They had to be involved in raising funds for school uniforms and exercise books through contacting local business and through funds raised for community festivities such as Ganesh Utsav. There was also a need for the community to influence the education system through voicing its opinion on the quality and type of education received by their children.

With these needs emerging, the social workers began to form youth groups in the community of older school children and ex-students who were largely dropouts. They worked on such issues as cleaning play-grounds, getting there early or sleeping on the school grounds to start a movement of preventing defecation around it, and getting the corporation to repair a persistently leaking school roof. They helped organise community based programmes, as also school based ones such as anand mela and day camps. Youngsters, who had the image of "no-gooders" in the eyes of teachers and the community, increasingly gained a new status and respect and began to change their own self-image. Training sessions were held for them to develop social consciousness and the problems of the educational system to associate them more appropriately in the work in the community and the school. Inter-slum programmes were also held for these youth groups, especially at the College. In one slum colony, where social tensions prevailed, the police who had great hesitation in giving permission, were amazed at the organisation of an anand mela (fun fair) by the very youth they identified as trouble makers.

Out of these youth groups, para-professional workers were identified for full-time work in the team of the Social Services Department, Thus, a new dimension was
added to the existing team of social workers with the master's and bachelor's degrees. Since most of them belonged to the community, they became an asset as both spokespersons for the community and project representatives in the community. Though combining these two roles was none too easy, these were very crucial roles.

Women's groups for skills development such as tailoring, literacy and non-formal education were commenced in some communities. Balwadis were also established and managed by community groups.

**Project Management**

At each centre, the Social Services Department was encouraged to set up a School Committee for the planning and implementation of the programme, with representatives from all the schools, the population of which ranged from around 1,500 to 7,000, in one building, serving the children in the local community.

**Conclusion**

This paper has shown the need for a holistic approach to the education of the disadvantaged child based on an analysis of the contextual realities of the child, the child's family and the community. It has highlighted social workers' analysis of the problem situation in the field of education and the responsive strategies employed in problem solving.

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**Footnotes**

1. Agricultural Economics Research Centre, *Primary Education In India: Participation and Wastage.* (Delhi: University of Delhi, May, 1968)

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