the status quo and still do something about poverty and prejudice in America? One can seem to be doing something and yet avoid the issue through entering the antipoverty business, via neatly packaged justifications and elegant experimental designs. But if committment is to go any deeper, if social and human motives are to take precedence over narrow economic interests, then one must be committed to change and agitation, to sacrificing transient respectability, in order to win the respect of those one is trying to help. The very existence of such appalling irrational poverty and helplessness in American society is a more serious indictment of the helping than the helped. It is the YMCA that needs Life-Skills Education.

Deborah Meier

A Report from Philadelphia: Head Start or Dead End?

The photograph of Negro children looking at an attractive young teacher while she intently reads them a book has become a symbol of the War on Poverty. It conveys a commitment to the innocent and forgotten child, concern for small and unglamorous details, and a one-to-one relationship between the middle-class reformer and the victims of poverty.

The Head Start program has been termed the one unmixed blessing of the War on Poverty and LBJ's pride and joy. Since it deals with the education (and not integration) of the very young, it is subject to fewer complications than programs dealing with employment, retraining for adults, and housing.

Yet even in this deceptively simple area the basic difficulties of the Poverty Program reflect themselves in a hodgepodge of conflicting ideologies and interests. Patronage politics, Negro nationalism, middle-class reformism, bureaucratic bungling, and the highest idealism and self-sacrifice—all make themselves felt in the new nurseries.

The Philadelphia Get Set project extends the Head Start concept into a year-around program. After the success of one summer's Head

Start, it was assumed that a year or two of pre-kindergarten enrichment would help disadvantaged children compete with their middle-class peers. For this purpose the federal government contracted with the Philadelphia Board of Education for a program involving 5,000 three- and four-year-olds for a minimum of one year. Since the program began only September, 1965, it is too early to judge its success. Some of its problems are unique to Philadelphia, but many others are certain to appear wherever the program gets under way.

While Get Set teachers are hired by the Board of Education, they are not required to satisfy normal certification or substitute requirements. As a result, the program has attracted many men and women who otherwise would not make their way into public school teaching. On the whole, these are people of *greater* general intelligence than their elementary school counterparts. A minority of course is attracted by the special hours possible, or by the relatively good pay. Probably a third of the staff is Negro and about a tenth male. But by and large these people demonstrate a greater interest in the problems of deprived children than would ordinary school teachers.

The 200 teachers were given a two-week training program which proved essentially chaotic and confusing. Within a few weeks, after having lost some of their original self-confidence, they were thrown out into the field. Their only support from then on came from the eight well-meaning but harrassed supervisors who had to divide their limited hours among eight or nine different "schools" scattered throughout the city. Thus some teachers had as many as three different supervisors during their first five months. Basically, however, the supervisors, who are the only experienced pre-school personnel in the program, are without any power and perform the functions of messengers and clerks. All problems, both weighty and petty, must be cleared by the Director, who looks upon teachers and especially supervisors as threats to her prestige and power.

Get Set classes are held in churches, recreation centers, and settlement houses. Lack of classroom space is typical in areas where, at present, many children are deprived of even kindergarten. (One of the ironies of the program is that Get Set offers pre-kindergarten services to three- and four-year-olds, whose five-year-old siblings must remain at home.) Perhaps the most shocking aspect of the program for most new teachers has been the physical state of the centers. While some are in lovely spacious churches, most are in dark, dingy rooms, with poor lighting, inadequate toilet facilities, no yards or gyms, etc. In a general effort to fill up the enrollment and spend the money provided by Con-

gress, supervisors were instructed to put as many teachers into the centers and as many children into the rooms as possible. Where rooms were ample and airy they were divided in half with makeshift partitions. Some rooms are as small as 200 square feet, and sometimes two classrooms operate side-by-side in one room of 500 square feet, with only chairs or tables separating the two groups.

Despite the presence of elected Community Action Councils, the Get Set program is run in accordance with normal school procedures—from the top down—and is aimed towards eventually integrating the program into the school system rather than the community. The teachers were somewhat dismayed at first to learn that most of the mothers had heard that Get Set would be opening day care centers, thereby enabling the mothers to get jobs. They were disappointed that the hours we could provide were at maximum 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M., and that for most children we could offer only morning or afternoon programs for only four days a week. Few were aware that a family-means test excluded children whose parents earned over $6,000. Naturally the criteria encourage cheating by both parents and teachers.

Despite these shortcomings, the demand in most communities was immediate and overwhelming. In the heart of the more crowded ghettos the centers were besieged. In marginal areas the response was slower and many centers remained half- or even quarter-full. The administrators wavered between relenting on income ceilings in order to increase enrollment and cracking down on the ceiling limitation in fear of exposure. Some children were admitted, expelled and readmitted as rules changed. Teachers and supervisors coped with contradictory rules that changed from day to day, always ready, if not willing, to take the blame for having made the wrong guess. Meanwhile they were bombarded with threats and slogans from higher-ups, such as "dedication can conquer all," and "if you don't like it, quit." If they suggested innovations, they were told that "we're part of the public school system, and it's not done that way." When they complained during the early months about the absence of blocks, dolls, paints, paper, etc., they read in *The Philadelphia Bulletin* that their director, Mrs. Elizabeth T. McCabe, had stated, "I don't care about tables or chairs. I'm interested in dedicated teachers who want to work with children. Sometimes I wish I didn't have a whole lot of equipment. It can get in the way of teaching."

They had only to pick up *The Inquirer* to learn that Mrs. McCabe, a Negro, considered herself an expert on the parents whose children they were teaching: "If they didn't have children at home, they'd spend more time in the beer gardens than they would at work. I know this commu-

nity. Personally I wish we could take children from these mothers all day long." At a Friday training session, Mrs. McCabe informed the teachers that the Board of Education was impressed with the "special, unique and unusual quality" of their teamwork, which she attributed to an atmosphere in which every teacher felt free to punish any child, even if it wasn't "her" child.

II

Demoralization aside, teachers were most confused when they tried to comprehend the purpose of the program and the specific means by which they were supposed to carry it out. Consultants from the federal program had talked during the early training period about the importance of visual, sensual, concrete materials, about free play and non-teacher-dominated activity, about the concept of "play as child's work," about activity appropriate to stages of maturity, and so forth. But a list of what was to be "taught and learned" was handed out and mimeoed sheets were periodically distributed listing techniques quite the opposite of those recommended by the consultants.

Friday training sessions were supposedly the answer to the lack of experience with which most teachers came into the program. But they soon deteriorated—starting late and ending by lunchtime. While children are expected to sit and learn for over five hours a day in our school system, it was generally conceded that only two to three hours could be asked of teachers. Pep talks and introductions from Mrs. McCabe took up the first hour, sometimes extended by group singing or amateur talent shows. The director and her husband, who is supervisor in charge of cultural enrichment (which has so far meant a trip to see a worn-out Santa Claus at a downtown department store), played a violin–piano duet, "Danny Boy." A speech on the glories of marriage was made to an "expectant bride." Everyone was urged to share her little adventures and talents with "our one big happy family."

Meanwhile, back in the classroom, the teachers and children carry on. The caliber of the teachers and supervisors and the present cautious enthusiasm of the community has produced a superficial impression of success in many centers: children seem happy, parents satisfied, and teachers feel some children have changed for the better. Since an organized program of research appears to be in the hands of the director's husband—who has not had any background in this field—it may be a long time till we can properly evaluate the program. In the absence of a controlled and overall evaluation, one is forced to conclude that almost everything is occurring somewhere and sometimes.

Most supervisors—insofar as they have an effect on the educational practices of their teachers—favor non-authoritarian classrooms with controlled but extensive free play in the general tradition of nursery school practice, with perhaps some extra emphasis on language development. On the whole, they agree with Martin Deutsch, the most eminent expert in this area, that these programs must aim at reinforcing whatever self-confidence and positive self-image deprived children bring to school. But at least one supervisor has advocated spankings for disobedience, water over the head for tantrums, and still more medieval techniques.

The teachers are baffled. Most are open to persuasion and eager and willing to learn at this stage. In a year at most they will have settled into patterns which will be hard to alter. They are skeptical about traditional nursery school values and techniques. They do not know why middle-class children should go to nursery school or why early childhood school experts have advocated the nondirective, freewheeling environment. They tend to equate a child-centered nursery school with baby-sitting, and a teacher-dominated room with "learning." They settle for gimmicks which will meet the outward appearances of "play," while in fact they really are teaching counting, "nice" words, better pronunciation, the alphabet, phonetics, colors, shapes, better manners, please and thank you. They are constantly on the look-out for a didactic message to impart to their charges.

"What have I done today to prepare these children for kindergarten or first grade," is the latent worry in the minds of many teachers. And while most have raised their own children in an environment of considerable freedom, they wonder if deprived children don't need greater discipline. Shouldn't "getting them ready" mean preparing them for the harsher aspects of reality? If they have to stand in line to go to the toilet, or say the Pledge of Allegiance in kindergarten, maybe we should introduce them to such practices now?

It is often the best intentions that lead teachers into such attitudes: they want to "do something" for these children and it is difficult for most teachers to avoid translating this desire into an imposing and manipulative classroom approach. They are restrained by the emphasis given in the training period on free play and by their sensitivity to the children's reactions to manipulation. Their manipulative techniques are generally nonpunitive, and, in contrast to many ghetto public school teachers, they demonstrate much warmth and affection for their charges.

On the other hand, they are encouraged into stricter and more dominating techniques by parents and community laymen, who feel that their children have been short-changed in ghetto schools in the past and

who tend to equate harsh discipline and the three R's with Real Education. The parents are eager for their children to adapt, and willingly support strict discipline and high conformity. They have been told their children fail because they misbehave, don't listen, squirm and cause trouble. This is what they tell the teachers, who hardly know what to believe and who are hardly in a position to make up for the lack of a consistent educational program.

III

From top to bottom the purpose of this pre-school program is almost never squarely faced. No one stops to examine the nature of the educational failure which has occurred in our poverty schools. Everyone agrees rather glibly that the children of poverty—and particularly of ghetto poverty—are performing badly in the lower grades and dropping out of high school at an alarming rate. And everyone notes that these children show their most symptomatic failure in the areas dealing with reading and the "language arts." While it is agreed that ghetto schools are incompetently staffed, under-equipped and overcrowded, most observers feel that something even more basic goes wrong with ghetto children. The notion is that they *come* to the schools with too many educational handicaps. In view of the fact that middle-class children often have one to three years more actual formal schooling by the time they are six, not to speak of the informal educational advantages of more prosperous, motivated families, it is natural that they should do much better in school. If poor children, the theory goes, could get some of this additional formal and informal "head start," they too would enter school better prepared for success.

But this is an insufficient and in fact misleading statement of the problem. It ignores the evidence that Harlem children enter school with less of a handicap than they have six years later—after the school system has "enriched" them. It ignores the fact that 25 percent of the children in North Philadelphia schools at the end of first grade seem to be college-bound on the basis of achievement and IQ, compared to only 4 percent at the end of sixth grade. It ignores the fact that most poor children do learn the mechanics of reading and compete more or less successfully until the fourth grade where they reach an early and final plateau. It ignores the fact that in the early years poor children are more conforming, quieter, and more amenable to school routines than children in schools with high academic achievement levels.

Each of these facts points to deep rifts within the general society in regard to the purposes of the War on Poverty. And the teaching methods

that each individual teacher tends to fall back on are likely to reflect his feelings about social change in general.

IV

In their attitudes toward education, teachers fall into three roughly defined groups which we shall imprecisely label (1) public school traditionalists, (2) reformers, and (3) radicals.

Those whom we call public school traditionalists want to continue the standard patterns of dealing with poor children, but to start earlier. There is no question in these teachers' minds where the fault lies: with the poor themselves. Such an approach emphasizes discipline, rules, morality, authority, and the three R's. This outlook would have it that poor children cannot afford the luxury, too rampant among middle-class "brats" anyway, of a free and child-centered classroom. Only through a willingness to learn by old-fashioned methods (which worked so well for the poor in the past), will they develop the necessary know-how. Some hold these views with considerable sophistication. Others are merely ignorant of historical fact (the poor of the past rarely received an education beyond the sixth grade and were considered successfully schooled if they had mastered the mechanics of reading and arithmetic). They are ignorant as well of the nature of ghetto schools (which are *already* authoritarian and nineteenth-century oriented), and of the kind of problems that poor children produce in schools (severe discipline problems are not common until they reach that fourth grade learning plateau). Many teachers naturally but incorrectly assume that lower-class parents are belligerent. In fact, while hostility and fear toward the school is common among the disadvantaged, they generally defer to the school on all matters of discipline, and back the school against their own children in times of conflict or trouble.

If the argument were to go on in the arena of theory, problems of fact would not worry us. But given the malice or ignorance of many of those who direct this program, the primitive physical conditions teachers are faced with, and a general downgrading of the need for serious training, the ideology of traditional school thinking may win out by default, as it has in our city grade schools. The more independent, sophisticated and forceful teachers who want to help children and are sensitive to their pains are rapidly driven out of the program or forced to make so many compromises that they soon bring only a small part of their original spirit to school.

In opposition to this trend are the "reformers" in the field. Unlike the traditionalists, they have few rigid answers, and hold many diverse viewpoints. But on the whole they accept the idea that "deprived"

children lack a home environment conducive to learning, and that good pre-school experiences of the sort middle-class children naturally receive are necessary to academic success. They seek enthusiastically therefore to remake these less fortunate children into something more akin to the successful middle-class five-year-old.

The reformers claim that the greatest difference between deprived and middle-class children lies in their respective language abilities. The deprived child is said to be held back by inadequate or nonexistent experiences out of which language skill might develop, and an environment where little verbal or written interchange exists that can serve as an example or as a laboratory for the child.

Reformers usually favor an environment of security and pleasure in which children could identify new experiences with warm, happy associations. The new experiences fall into two classifications: (1) good and consistent examples of politeness, middle-class articulation, vocabulary and neatness; and (2) a planned program to introduce the children through experiences, games, drills, etc. to various habits, manners, skills, and language arts already familiar to the middle-class child entering kindergarten. They will play house and, as they do so, learn how to set the table, say "please pass the butter," answer the door or phone politely, etc. They will take trips to the farm and play farm lotto so that they are familiar with words like "duck" and "sheep" (which appear so often in IQ tests and primary readers). As far as possible, the teacher is to present the children with an attractive picture of what life could be and is like in the larger world, as differentiated from what it is like in their own dismal communities.

The "radicals," while they share many reforming values, would rather remake the school than the child. They are likely to question whether lower-class children *really are* lacking in the rich experiential base for good language development or in long-run goals for success. They are likely to point instead to the special abilities which lower-class children have developed to cope with hardship and uncertainty. They argue that such strengths have in the past led to withdrawal in the face of certain threatening situations, such as school. The very strength of lower-class children has of necessity—the necessity to survive—produced resistance, apathy, fatalism, and superstition. Attitudes which help one to survive in a community closed off from escape can be weaknesses in a world where intellectual growth and creativity are possible. The "culture of poverty," however, cannot be eliminated by pretending it doesn't exist for four hours a day—which is what setting the children a nice, middle-class example amounts to.

As a first step, ghetto schools must realize that change begins with self-acceptance. They must find ways to utilize the "culture of poverty" itself, to begin with the child's own experiences, good and bad, to involve his parents and his community, and to let each child's growth develop from his already functioning personality rather than cut off from it and rootless. Only a child who comes to school as himself is capable of going beyond mechanical learning skills. The child who shifts upon entering to a special school personality, a shell divorced from all meaningful life experience, will leave both the shell and what he learns through it at the door when he goes out again.

Even with the best of intentions, a school that eliminates all that is familiar to a young child will be perceived by him as a threat to his self-esteem and identity. Radical teachers argue that we must find ways of teaching these youngsters based on their own backgrounds, families, language abilities and experiences. Further, these circumstances must be accepted without the intrusion of moral judgment. If the child is truly given a chance to grow in terms of his own awareness, he will eventually be able to decide for himself what kind of world he wants to live in and what kind of person he wants to become.

V

Education alone will not resolve the issues at stake in the War on Poverty. And as long as the public permits widespread discrimination in employment, housing, and public services, it is not likely to spend the money to equalize educational opportunity. Under such circumstances the poor will continue to receive much of their more creative education from informal educational institutions that arise within the ghetto and that will arise tomorrow in new forms—through the civil rights movement, community organization, political movements, etc. But since much education does take place, for good or ill, within the formal framework of our publicly-supported schools, and many of tomorrow's choices will be determined by the way the schools educate, the alternative methods of pre-school education pose a critical choice. The ideals of childhood education can be translated for lower-class children with the emphasis on democratic purposes and respect for the child's integrity, or they can become tools to mold the poor but essentially keep them in their place. Education can accept society's need to reform itself or simply pretend to reform the child. It will never be argued so crudely, but these are the issues at stake. And, ironically, if those in control fail to learn anything, or if we fail to produce the kind of pressure that will force them into new paths of educational effort, the addition of two vulnerable

years to the present school tenure may simply produce an exaggeration of the benumbing and depressive effect that ghetto schools are already having. Under such circumstances the highly vaunted Head Start will only be a head start into a dead end.

Joseph B. Judge

Brownsville: A Neighborhood in Trouble

In Brownsville, a section of Brooklyn once almost entirely Jewish but now radically changed, the War on Poverty is a misnomer. The wars that occur in Brownsville are mostly wars of the poor against the Economic Opportunity Board and the poor against one another. The Brownsville population of 125,000 Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and aging Jews presents to the rare visitor a microcosm of all the city's social ills. It is a community of unrelieved poverty, dirt, decay, drunkenness, and despair. Its condition is the result of forty years of neglect. In *A Walker in the City,* a reminiscence of his youth in Brownsville, Alfred Kazin says that his one prevailing desire was to escape. This continues to be the obsession of the average Brownsville resident. Most despair of life ever getting any better while they stay here. The turnover of population is alarming. In one public school, from September to January of last year, there was a 100 percent turnover of school population, 1,500 on register and 1,500 on transfers.

Hasn't the War on Poverty changed all this? After all, the city has announced that Brownsville is one of the poverty areas where things will be radically altered. Unfortunately, a large percentage of people in Brownsville does not read newspapers and consequently has heard nothing about the War on Poverty. Those few who have heard the news have become inured to promises. And promises are all they have received. It is almost unbelievable, but up to July 4, 1966, exactly one half of one percent of the total funds sent to New York City under the Federal Economic Opportunity Act had found its way to Brownsville. The only existing program was Head Start—which is funded under the Board of Education. Finally, there was no unique Brownsville Plan which had