LORRAINE M. SULLIVAN

Lorraine M. Sullivan, public school administrator and civic leader noted for her work with inner-city children in parent-child centers and for her administrative leadership as Superintendent, District Eight, for the Chicago Public Schools, is Assistant Superintendent in Charge of Curriculum for the Chicago Public Schools. A graduate of the Chicago Teachers College, she holds the following degrees: B.S., M.S., and M.A. from De Paul University; and D.Ed., Harvard University. She taught in the Chicago Public Schools (Grades 3 to 8, high school, and elementary school for the mentally handicapped), and served as principal of various schools in the city. She also taught at De Paul University and Chicago Teachers College.

Among Miss Sullivan's professional affiliations are the National Education Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the Illinois Education Association, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the National Association of Administrative Women in Education, the International Reading Association, Pi Lambda Theta, and Kappa Delta Pi. She is an author of *Staff Study Report Four—Compensatory Education*, published by the Chicago Public Schools.

Lorraine M. Sullivan

Miss Sullivan has been active in community service, having served on the Women's Board of the National Conference of Christians and Jews; with the Court Committee of the Catholic Big Sisters; the Advisory Board, Midwest Urban Progress Center; the Advisory Board, Upward Bound; as a member of the Education Committee, Operation Bootstraps; and various other groups. She was the recipient of an award as "outstanding citizen working with inner-city children and the community" of the Citizens Scholarship Committee; Lawndale Youth Commission award 1970 "Outstanding contribution in Education"; Lawndale Urban Progress Educational Award; Model City Program Mayoral Citation; Chicago State College award for "Service to the Teaching Profession."

Miss Sullivan is a newcomer to the authorship team of the Scott, Foresman Language Arts Department and is a coauthor of the Scott Foresman Reading Systems.

LET US NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE CHILDREN

A relevant education for the children—this is the plea of dissatisfied urban parents and other critics of the schools. Groups have protested, picketed, and boycotted schools to draw attention to educational problems. They demand teachers who are prepared to understand the learning style of their children and to adopt a corresponding teaching style.

The voices in America calling for a different approach in teaching inner-city children are making a valid request. They know that these children can learn, and learn well, in an educational setting suited to the children's learning styles and paces. Inner-city children learn in ways that differ from the ways suburban and small-town children learn. They may lack readiness for formal instruction using a traditional format.

The inner-city negative educational syndrome will not change until parents, as well as the children, become positively oriented to education and begin to participate in it. The greatest return from investments in educational programs will come from children whose education is launched in a success-oriented, "I-can-do" environment involving their parents. Inner-city children begin school with the same enthusiasm as other children, similarly stimulated by their parents' interest and pride in their first school days. The spark dies early, dampened by disappointment, disillusionment, the loss of parental interest to the constant struggle for a living, and an instructional style not suited to the children.

Lorraine M. Sullivan

In the past, the home influence has been discounted on the assumption that the school could overcome the shortcomings of the home. Teachers have believed that success in school depended on good teaching, children's innate capacity, and motivation. Today, this point of view has been superseded by an understanding of the importance of parental influence and early childhood training. The marked difference between the amount and quality of adult attention received by children raised in the inner city and by suburban and small-town children is now recognized, and schools know what must be done. The school program must reach into the homes and effect changes in the children's home environment. The home, in its turn, needs to be receptive and understanding of the efforts of the schools. Parent-school interaction is necessary in order to establish meaningful relationships with families of the children.

Historically the traditional instructional program has not forestalled the pattern of accelerated decline common to children in inner-city schools unless the home has become an agent of reinforcement and extension. School failure has gradually alienated the children from school. These children require educational experiences on a success continuum, experiences sensitive in method to their spontaneous interest in learning. Mere enrichment experiences will not offset the skill deficiencies that will otherwise result. Skill with words and comprehension of ideas that sprout from the thoughts behind words are probably the most essential prerequisites for formal learning. These are skills lacking in children raised in the inner city. If deprivation beginning at an early age progressively limits and eventually blocks entry into the mainstream of society, then an early start must be made to offset the absence of parental teaching. When education is relevant and success-oriented, inner-city children do learn.

A CHILD-PARENT PROGRAM

One promising new approach to providing early childhood education involving parents is the establishment in the inner city of experimental child-parent education centers. In a success-oriented environment in which young children can see themselves as important, they are "turned on" for learning. Attitudes toward themselves and others, interest in learning, increased activity, conversation, and enthusiasm are all evidences of the change. Parents are increasingly aware of the role of the home in preparing children for school and have renewed hope that education will develop the full potential of their

children. Very early, teachers are conscious of the increased attention span of the children; they notice children's growing ability to listen and respond to verbal directions. Language improvement is evident too, as children begin to use short descriptive sentences rather than one-word answers or physical signs.

Parents also see the difference in their children's speaking and listening skills. They are quick to compare these achievements with those of their other children who had a more traditional introduction to school.

Early childhood is without doubt the most promising time for effecting desired improvement in intellectual growth. In a school climate that helps each child believe "I can do," young children can and do learn how to learn.

INNER-CITY LEARNERS AND HOW TO REACH THEM

Children learn at different rates and in different ways. But most of them have the ability to learn, and all of them learn best when they are interested. Inner-city children require some different approaches because their value system is different, and they may have an inferior self-concept.

The Need for Approval. Self-concept can be changed through educational experiences that provide a feeling of success, confidence, and self-worth—"I can do" plus "I am somebody." Classroom activities leading to immediate personal gratification are essential to these children. They delight in public displays of approval. Besides the teacher's acceptance of their responses, they like to applaud themselves and their classmates by clapping or voicing their admiration. Early in the readiness phase, the children can learn to assess their own and others' responses. Children are willing to try when they feel that they have some control over what they are learning, when the atmosphere is patient and friendly, and when they are assured that if they make mistakes, they'll be encouraged to try again. If they are turned off when their responses differ from the expectation of the teacher, in the future they may refuse to respond.

There are many ways to communicate to children that they and their performance are admired and appreciated. The teacher might display in the classroom in imaginative ways the children's art work and

their photographs. Dialog needs to be continuing—and to be truly a dialog. Also, children like to be close to, even touching, the teacher as they work and play. The teacher transmits to the children by his actions the message "I value you; I value learning on your part."

Learning Style. The learning style of children raised in the inner city is not efficient. Rather, it is slow, physical, nonverbal, problem-centered, concrete. These children live for today and are practical in their approach to life and learning. Poor language development, inexperience in distinguishing between noise and meaningful sound, inability to sustain attention, a negative attitude—all contribute to the character of their learning style.

In these conditions, teacher's presentations obviously need to be simple, specific, and clear, emerging from the teacher's awareness of exactly what he expects the children to do and for what purpose. Learning tasks should be sequenced and sufficiently limited to guarantee completion of the lesson. And there is need for constant reinforcement of what is taught.

Perceptual Development. Children from inner-city communities frequently have poor perceptual development as a result of limited adult guidance in play and little opportunity to play with a variety of toys. Often their toys are sticks, boxes, and other abandoned items—not a very rich assortment on which to build an instructional program. They are unfamiliar with the educationally oriented toys introduced at the toddler stage in more prosperous communities and as a result may lack the large-muscle and manipulative skills that come from playing with such toys. Some of these children even lack awareness of their own bodies. Training in visual perception is needed to get the children to observe the world around them, and of course they need many new experiences with objects, activities, and phenomena. Also, they must learn to attach verbal labels to things they see and do. A program that combines language stimulation with perception and motor activities helps them get ready to learn.

Language Development. In a program for inner-city children, language development is properly the major thrust. To begin, the teacher needs to encourage children to make full use of whatever language skills they possess. Emphasis should be placed on stimulating children's ability to perceive and respond to their surroundings and to

form concepts and express them in language. Referring to school equipment repeatedly by name is one way to enlarge vocabulary and sharpen awareness of the relation of words to things.

The teacher should take cues from each child, interacting with him, encouraging him to speak, and helping him discern relationships, follow and express simple directions, and solve problems. Practice on classification skills, difficult for inner-city children, can also contribute to language development because it invites naming and discussing objects and their properties. Procedures in which children play the role of the teacher, asking questions and monitoring their own answers, are helpful and increase youngsters' independence. In time, children should be required to respond to multiple directions and encouraged to participate spontaneously and abundantly in discussions.

Through all this the teacher needs to carry on an intensive verbal bombardment, putting in words what he is doing, has done, and will do; describing, explaining, and commenting; asking and answering. Gradually children learn to listen, with increasing interest and lessening distraction for lengthening periods of time. They develop a lively interest in stories. They begin to speak in sentences. An understanding of opposites develops. They learn to use affirmative and negative statements in reply to a question or a request and to use prepositions such as *on, in, over,* and *under* accurately for statements describing arrangements of objects. They learn to recognize colors by name and begin to perform simple deductions.

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Instruction in child-parent education centers should strike a balance between order and freedom, providing a steadying routine with freedom to explore, ask questions, and receive answers from adults. The classroom should be an organized, efficient workroom that encourages motor and sensory experiences through active investigation of materials and discovery of how they work.

Emphasis in the instructional program should be on the youngsters to be taught rather than on what is to be taught. Often children fail in reading because they have not had enough meaningful activities to enable them to take the first step. Teachers can zero in, in this kind

of situation, to develop the skills needed to ready the children for reading.

Activities introduced can be effectively divided into group-teaching experiences and area-teaching projects. In group teaching the teacher presents, in a climate of active participation, a skill that has been identified as important for later growth. As explained earlier in this chapter, skills that need emphasis are language skills, to develop the children's vocabularies; conceptual skills, to crystallize thoughts and ideas in words; perceptual skills, to clarify ability really to see and hear; and motor skills, needed to improve eye-hand coordination. Every new learning experience should grow naturally out of the experiences that preceded it and prepare children for future learning experiences.

Area-teaching projects are presented in a special area partially partitioned by screens to keep the children's attention with the teacher. The verbal development program is best carried out in this special area. Here, too, children engage in free play, using housekeeping materials, blocks, large toys, records, art materials, puzzles, books, and pictures. Self-selection of work materials and self-initiated activities are encouraged. The need for order is developed early, with children understanding that everything has a place when not in use.

Every item provided in the classroom should be selected for the contribution it can make to learning. In selecting equipment, teachers might ask themselves these questions: Will it further the children's learning in individual and small-group situations? Will it motivate children to do things on their own in work-play situations? Will it be safe and durable?

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

As is true with all children, the success of inner-city children in learning to read depends to a considerable extent on the active involvement of the parents. Family attitudes that over a long period of time have been negative toward education will not change immediately, but every indication is that the parent-school approach is promising. The school can become a resource center for the family.

Parent-school interaction serves several purposes: (1) it develops a positive identification with the school; (2) it reduces the isolation

often characteristic of inner-city parents; (3) it interests parents in ideas that help them carry on the children's education in the home, using common household objects as instructional materials; (4) it helps parents develop community leadership skills; (5) it helps parents learn effective ways of dealing with problems of their everyday lives; and (6) it provides a center around which parent-community-school relationships can develop. The school staff and the parents can meet together to consider problems of education, family health, and family finance. This interaction provides opportunities to develop problem-solving skills that parents can apply to personal problems in times of family stress. Teachers may present demonstration lessons in which they show parents how they teach so the parents can learn how to help their children learn.

Participating parents are messengers of good education to their neighbors, spreading the seed corn of their experiences. In addition they learn how to act as positive supports to their schools, giving encouragement and guidance to what they recognize as good educational programs for their children. Parents may form parent advisory councils for the school to give direction to the parent program and plan special school projects.

The parent program may focus on the following:

Child development discussions
Parent advisory council meetings
Parent-education programs through classroom visitation, teaching demonstrations, instruction in how a teacher teaches, helping in a classroom, or viewing films or television shows
Arts and crafts
Public information sessions on issues of concern to parents
Field trips
Home nursing
Economics of everyday living
Sewing
Cooking
Independent reading
Cooperative parent self-help projects
School-sponsored bazaars, picnics, and family outings
Personal improvement of parents' academic skills leading to high-school equivalency diplomas.

In summary, creative talents can be unleashed in an educationally nutritional environment when parents, children, and teachers become partners in education. The potential for successful educational programs is enhanced when all members of the partnership work together in an atmosphere of understanding and cooperation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chicago Board of Education, Department of Pupil Personnel Services. *Report of the 1968-1969 City-Wide Testing Program, Chicago Public Schools.* Chicago: Chicago Board of Education, 1969.

Chicago Board of Education, District 8. "Child-Parent Education Center Research Data, District 8, Chicago Public Schools." Mimeographed. Chicago: Chicago Board of Education, District 8, 1969.

Naibitt, Noel. "Model Project, Division of Compensatory Education, ESEA Title I, Child-Parent Education Centers." Duplicated. Chicago: Chicago Board of Education, 1968.