

# IMPORT OF PRE-SCHOOL TRAINING CITED

THIS PAST SUMMER'S "Project Head Start" operation proved conclusively that parents can help prepare their children for scholastic success in a number of important respects according to Dr. Joseph Caliguri, Madison School principal and director of the county-wide pre-school program.

Dr. Caliguri listed the following areas in which parental concern and guidance are of particular significance: (1) health status, (2) social skills, (3) "learning to learn" skills, and (4) self-image.

"Health status refers to nutrition, physical examinations, immunizations and the correction of physical defects," Dr. Caliguri said. "These aspects of health status are important because a sound body free from pain or faulty physical equipment prevents limitations to learning."

"Health services provided by Project Head

Start revealed that a considerable number of children were receiving less than a "head start" from parents relative to health care," he said. "Depriving children of necessary health care is the first step toward failure in school."

"In the second instance, the importance of social skills relates to the boys and girls learning to get along with each other, learning how to adapt to success and failure in group situations, learning social manners, and the like. The Social Behavior Inventory used as a guide in the program revealed that children can be socially unprepared for school life. An example is the withdrawn or the over-aggressive pupil. In short, the pupil who has learned very little about give and take in human relations. The child who has social problems usually does not measure up to his achievement potential. A look at an excerpt from a teacher's case study describes one situation:

"John Doe appeared to be withdrawn at the beginning of the project. He would enter the room, speak to no one, and just sit by himself. Sometimes, he would play with molding clay or cut and paste materials provided him. John came from a large family, and apparently he did not get enough to eat, since he was quite skinny. His mother said he was the quiet one. In working with John, day by day, he would refuse to talk and showed a desire to cut himself off from the rest of the world."

"The remainder of the case study indicated how this fine teacher worked with the boy to find the cause of his stubborn withdrawal. Exploring the conditions of the home, as well as John's health status, provided the teacher with some "clues" to guide this withdrawn child toward social acceptance of other people. How factors other than intelligence can affect the success of a pupil was well documented in this situation, since John's achievement test results indicated he was very intelligent."

"In the third instance, 'learning to learn' skills, or providing an educational environment in the home, has been clearly proven to be necessary for success in kindergarten for all children. For under-privileged children, it is doubly important. Professor Benjamin S. Bloom

of the University of Chicago states that intelligence--the capacity to learn--grows as much during the first four years of life as in the next thirteen.

"The point is not that pre-school children should be taught to read and write. More important is that they be given an environment in which learning is valued. Just as the painter uses a scaffold to paint a wall, the parent who provides 'learning to learn' skills for children is one who is using a scaffold of learning prior to school entry. The parent who talks with and answers questions of children, corrects poor language habits, reads to children, and the like, is the real educational partner of children."

"Finally, the self-image factor refers to how we really value ourselves, and how we react to what others think of us. Negro children, as do other minority group children, often have a compounded problem regarding identity of self. Parents who feel inferior, and a society which tends to look down upon the Negro, make it difficult for many Negro children to feel a strong identity with self. As a result, many Negro children unconsciously develop feelings of self-contempt, limited desire to achieve and a limited desire to aspire to other than their own immediate surroundings."

"A glaring example of self-image problems can be cited in the case study mentioned earlier. Fulfilling the basic needs of children in terms of love, affection, discipline, independence, physical health, and the like, aids the development of a positive self-image in boys and girls. In turn, a positive self-image insures motivation of children toward learning."

"To summarize," Dr. Caliguri said, "parents represent the ignition key which can switch children toward learning or toward non-learning. Pre-school programs reveal the importance of "early bird" readiness for formal school tasks. The importance of providing a favorable educational environment to sharpen the ability of youngsters to absorb formal learning cannot be over-emphasized. The success of pre-school work will depend largely on parents who support, and become intimately involved, in such programs."

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