Inner-City Children Can Be Taught to Read: Four Successful Schools

by

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SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

"Reading achievement in the early grades in almost all inner-city schools is both relatively and absolutely low. This project has identified four notable exceptions. Their success shows that the failure in beginning reading typical of inner-city schools is the fault not of the children or their background—but of the schools. None of the successes was achieved overnight; they required from three to nine years. The factors that seem to account for the success of the four schools are strong leadership, high expectations, good atmosphere, strong emphasis on reading, additional reading personnel, use of phonics, individualization, and careful evaluation of pupil progress. On the other hand, some characteristics often thought of as important to school improvement were *not* essential to the success of the four schools: small class size, achievement grouping, high quality of teaching, school personnel of the same ethnic background as the pupils', preschool education, and outstanding physical facilities." (page 30)

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INTRODUCTION

For some time before I began this project I had been intrigued by three facts. First, reading achievement in the early grades in almost all inner-city schools is both relatively and absolutely low.[1] Second, most laymen and most school people believe that such low achievement is all that can be expected. Third, I had seen for myself one inner-city school and had heard reports of several others in which reading achievement was *not* relatively low, in which it was, indeed, about the national average or better.

The first fact can be easily documented. Now that reading achievement scores by school are released to the public by many large-city school systems, the public itself can see the high correlation between these achievement scores and the average income level of the neighborhoods in which the elementary schools are located. The school officials of any large school system can easily make such an analysis for themselves. If they take the five (or ten) schools in the highest-income areas of their district, a similar number of schools in an average-income area, and a similar number of schools in the lowest-income area, they will almost certainly find that the reading achievement scores will generally distribute themselves accordingly: high for the high-income areas, more or less average for the average-income areas, low for the low-income areas. And the school officials, better than the public, will know (or should know) just how low the reading achievement is, absolutely, in the lowest-income schools. Several studies have done this correlation between reading achievement and income on an extensive basis. Possibly the best known are those by Patricia Cayo Sexton for all the elementary schools of a large Midwestern city[2] and by James S. Coleman and others for the nation as a whole.[3]

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[1] By "relatively low" I mean relative to schools in other areas. By "absolutely low" I mean low in terms of the requirements of the middle grades. Many of the inner-city children who fail to learn to read in the primary grades never learn to read well. They leave school years later as functional illiterates. Moreover, during their remaining years in school they are constantly frustrated and handicapped by their reading deficiency.

[2] See *Education and Income,* Viking, 1961, pp. 25-38.

[3] See *Equality of Educational Opportunity,* U.S. Office of Education, 1966, esp. pp. 21 and 296.

In view of the general situation and the existence of studies such as those cited above, the second fact is understandable. Laymen and school people alike are not surprised to learn that reading achievement in the inner-city schools is very poor. What varies is their explanation for this phenomenon. Mrs. Sexton, more than ten years ago, explained it by saying (and offering evidence) that inner-city schools received less money. Such an explanation would hardly do today, since for several years now the (Federal) Elementary and Secondary Education Act, charitable foundations, and local school systems themselves have frequently provided *more* resources for inner-city schools than were available for schools in higher-income areas. The Coleman Report explained it in terms of the family background of the pupils. Arthur R. Jensen explained it primarily in terms of differences in intelligence.[4] Some educators explain it by saying that we do not yet know how to teach reading to disadvantaged children.

None of the above explanations satisfied me. Even though the family background of these children is generally poor, it is no poorer than that of millions of children who had learned to read in the United States in the past. Even though in my opinion the intelligence of poor children is somewhat lower, on the average, high intelligence is not necessary to learn the relatively simple skill of beginning reading. Perhaps the best evidence of this is the fact that several foreign countries are considerably more successful in teaching beginning reading to the whole population than we are. Most of all, the third fact (the apparent existence of successful schools) suggested to me that beginning reading achievement in inner-city schools does not have to be as low as it usually is.

Accordingly, I developed a hypothesis: that several inner-city public schools exist in the United States where reading achievement in the early grades is far higher than in most inner-city schools, specifically, is at the national average or higher. A study to investigate this hypothesis would have two purposes. If the hypothesis proved correct, the study would show that inner-city children can be taught reading well, and it might discover some common factors in the success of the good programs. In the spring of 1970, the Board of Directors of the Council for Basic Education approved my undertaking the project, and a grant was later obtained from the Victoria Foundation to cover some of the expenses.

[4] See Arthur R. Jensen, "How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?" in *Harvard Educational Review,* Winter 1969.

During the school year 1970-71 I conducted the study and found the four successful schools that serve as the basis of this report. Two of them are in New York, one in Kansas City, and one in Los Angeles. The remainder of this paper describes the project as a whole, describes in some detail the four successful schools, and draws some conclusions. Appendix 1 deals with the test that was used to determine reading ability. Appendix 2 contains a comment on beginning reading achievement and income.

THE PROJECT

Definitions

The school as the unit of study was not selected by accident. I could have studied a smaller unit, the teacher and her individual class, or a larger unit, the school system. I rejected the single class because almost all teachers have their pupils only one school year, and one school year is often insufficient, even for an outstanding teacher, to teach beginning reading skills to disadvantaged young children. Moreover, even if I had documented successes on the individual class basis, they could have been attributed to the outstanding quality of the individual teachers involved. There is a limited number of outstanding individual teachers at every level of the nation's public schools, and those teachers accomplish far more, by any one of several measures, than average teachers. To have documented such successes in reading instruction would have shown that disadvantaged children can be taught beginning reading well, but it would have reduced the chances of discovering success factors other than teacher quality.

On the other hand, I rejected the school system as a unit of study because, when the project was conceived, I did not believe that any big-city public school system in the country was succeeding in beginning reading instruction in all, or even most, of its inner-city schools. (During the course of the project, I found one system that did seem to be successful, but more about that later.)

Having defined the unit to be studied, I had to work out definitions for "inner-city" and "successful reading achievement."

Definition of an inner-city school may seem an easy matter, but it did present some difficulties. I began by using the term "ghetto," with the thought that these days it conveys a rather unambiguous meaning: a fairly homogeneous area in a large city inhabited by very low-income persons belonging to a group that is "trapped" in the area not only because of its poverty but because of its ethnic or national origin. The major such groups in the United States today are the blacks, the Puerto Ricans, and the Mexican-Americans. I later decided to discard "ghetto" for several reasons. First, many people dislike it, and some school people working in these areas do not like to have the term attached to their schools. Secondly, the

term "ghetto" is often associated with Negro areas only; Spanish-speaking groups prefer "barrio," and other poor groups do not like either term. Lastly, not all ghetto areas are populated by very poor people. In fact, in many large cities there are ghetto areas that are middle-class or at least not very poor. I was interested in schools attended by very poor children of whatever origin because such schools, in addition to having very low reading achievement, are generally associated with low expectations on the part of the public and school personnel. As it turned out, all of the inner-city schools I visited were attended largely by blacks, Puerto Ricans, or Mexican-Americans. This was due partly to the fact that a disproportionate number of our very poor people, particularly in our large cities, *are* members of these groups. It was due partly to happenstance; I was not successful in efforts to visit schools attended by very poor children who do not belong to any of these groups.

My final definition of an inner-city school was *a non-selective public school in the central part of a large city that is attended by very poor children.* In determining whether a school met this definition, I decided that Title I designation was a necessary but not sufficient criterion; the selection of schools for Title I funds varies considerably from large city to large city. A second criterion was a high percentage of children eligible for free lunch under the Federal program. Another criterion, which applied to New York City alone, was eligibility for the Special Service category. In New York City, about 240 of the 600 elementary schools are so eligible on the basis of five criteria: pupil turnover, teacher turnover, percentage of pupils on free lunch, number of children with foreign language problems, and the extent of welfare and attendance problems.

Successful reading achievement also had to be defined. Since most elementary schools in very low-income areas have reading achievement medians substantially below national norms on whatever nationally standardized test is used, I thought it reasonable to require that an inner-city school, to be regarded as successful, would have to achieve a national grade norm score as a median. But it seemed desirable to require that a "successful" school meet another test: that the percentage of gross failures be low. Typically, inner-city schools not only have a low achievement median, but the number of gross reading failures—children achieving far below national norm levels—is high.

The third grade seemed to be the best level at which to test this

success. In the first place, what might be called "beginning reading instruction" normally ends with the third grade. Although many children master the "mechanics" of reading by the second grade, some in the first, and a few even before coming to school, the standard reading curriculum in the United States assumes, starting with the fourth grade, that children have achieved the mechanics, and branches out into vocabulary extension, grammar, independent writing, and literature. In the second place, testing earlier than the third grade might have biased the outcome in favor of one or another reading method or approach. Today there are many different instructional methods and approaches being used, and they start out in different ways. But there comes a time, and I would submit that it is the third grade at the latest, by which the school should have taught the child the basic reading skills, whatever method or approach is used. Accordingly, reading success was examined in this project during the middle and latter part of the third grade. At that point the school, to be "successful," had to achieve a national grade-level norm or better as a median and had to have an unusually low percentage of non-readers. The non-readers, incidentally, may have been able to read some individual words but were nonetheless, for all practical purposes, unable to read.

Every effort in this project was made to avoid a bias with respect to particular instructional approaches, methods, and materials. In most cases I had no idea, before I visited the school, of the program being used. As I think will be evident to persons familiar with current reading instruction in the United States, the Council for Basic Education was determined to let the methodological chips fall where they may. At many points during the project I made this clear to school people and others. I developed an absurd illustration to emphasize the point: I said that if we found an inner-city school that achieved success in beginning reading by having the children stand on their heads for a half-hour every morning, I would write up such a school in the final report.

Getting and Winnowing the Nominations

As soon as the project was approved, in April of 1970, I began to gather names of schools that might ultimately qualify as success stories in this report. I asked specialists in the field of reading, publishers, and school officials for nominations. I did some searching of the literature. I placed a notice in the *CBE Bulletin.* I asked the

superintendents of five big-city systems and central-office administrators of six others for nominations. I kept the nomination process open for over a year. The search did not have to be a complete one, however. I did not need to find *all* of the inner-city schools that were successful in beginning reading instruction. The purpose of the search was simply to find enough schools so that several reasonably representative successes could be described and analyzed in the final report. Accordingly, there are undoubtedly a number of successful schools beyond the four that are written up in the next section.

All told, about 95 schools were nominated. Of these, some obviously were not non-selective public schools in the inner-city sections of large cities. But 69 seemed to be such schools, and to each of these I wrote a letter, addressed to the principal, asking if he believed that his school met both criteria (type of school and reading success) and if he would welcome an independent evaluation of reading achievement and the reading program. This step of asking the principal for permission to visit his school took a substantial toll of the nominees. Some principals did not reply at all. Others replied that they were not inner-city schools or that they were not successful in beginning reading instruction in terms of the criteria to be used. Finally, a number of principals refused to have me visit when the nature of the independent evaluation was spelled out in detail. In the end, I visited 17 schools in seven large cities. I would have visited a few more had there been time prior to the closing of school in May and June of 1971.

Independent Evaluation of Reading Achievement

I took for granted from the outset that an independent evaluation of reading achievement would have to be made. The alternative was to accept, in most cases, results on tests that the schools had administered themselves. Although it is customary in public education to do just that—to allow schools and school systems to evaluate themselves—it is obviously unreliable and unsatisfactory. Most teachers and administrators try to administer standardized tests honestly to their pupils. But without any auditing procedure, the temptations are very great, not only for teachers and administrators, but for publishers and others with an interest in the outcome. The greater the pressure for results—and the pressure is increasing with the current trend toward greater "accountability"—the less reliable self-evaluation becomes.

The existence of "irregularities" with respect to achievement testing is common knowledge among school people but has come to public attention only recently, for example in the case of certain New York City public schools.[1] Although most irregularities take the form of coaching (excessive preparation) for the test, there are more flagrant types of misbehavior, such as teaching the particular words to appear on the test, practicing on the test itself, changing the answers before the tests are scored, giving pupils aid during the test, allowing additional time, and failing to test selected pupils who are expected to do poorly. (I saw evidence or heard reliable reports of all of these irregularities during my visits to the seven large cities.) The question of coaching is a particularly difficult one because New York and other school systems tell their personnel that it is permissible to prepare pupils for the tests by drilling them on similar material. Particularly in the case of young children who have had little or no experience with such tests, some such preparation does seem justified because otherwise children who are experienced in test-taking will have an advantage. Problems arise because different schools engage in different amounts of such preparation.

My first plan was to administer a nationally standardized test. I rejected this because the tests are not entirely comparable and because whatever test was used would tend to favor schools in cities that used that particular test. Moreover, such a procedure would not have avoided the differences in pupil preparation for the kind of test involved, since all of the major nationally standardized reading achievement tests for the lower grades are similar in form. Accordingly, I decided to use a test that none of the large cities used.

The test tentatively selected was the Basic Test of Reading Comprehension used by Professor S. Alan Cohen of Yeshiva University.[2] Since that test was unpublished and unavailable to me, I decided (with Professor Cohen's permission) to make up a test based on the same approach. Because I was interested in testing the ability of poor children to read words that they already understood by ear, I devised a test entirely of words that I thought they so understood. I also decided to use a test different in form from the nationally standardized reading achievement tests. The test would then evaluate not their breadth of aural vocabulary nor their ability to take tests of the multiple-choice type, but their "mechanical" ability to read simple

[1] See articles in *The New York Times*, April 3, 5, 7, 9, 1971.

[2] See pages 67-69 of his *Teach Them All To Read*, Random House, 1969.

American English. After drafting a test, I tried it out in the city of Alexandria, Virginia, through the generous cooperation of its superintendent, Dr. John C. Albohm. Alexandria has 14 elementary schools whose reading scores at third-grade level range from substantially above national norm to substantially below. I gave the test to every present third-grade child in five schools: the two schools with the lowest reading scores in the city, two schools with average scores, and the school with the top scores. I also tested the fifth grade in one of the lowest schools. In addition, I tested the vocabulary on a number of individual children. This field testing allowed me to refine the test and obtain scores which could be equated with national norm scores on nationally standardized tests.

The resulting test contained 32 items and could be administered in 15 minutes actual test time. I planned to give the test myself so as to make the administration as uniform as possible. (Further details on the test are given in Appendix 1.)

The School Visits

The 17 big-city schools in the project were visited between January and June of 1971. With one exception, the school visits lasted two or three days. (The one exception, a school that obviously did not meet the inner-city criterion, was visited only one day.)

There were three purposes for visiting the schools. The first was to check on whether the school met the inner-city criterion. This involved asking various questions. The second was to ascertain, through administration of the test, whether the school met the reading-success criterion. The third was to determine the nature of the beginning reading program and, in those cases where the school seemed to meet both the inner-city and reading-success criteria, the factors that seemed to account for the success. All third-grade classes were tested as early as possible in the visit. The only third-grade children not tested were those absent and those who could not speak English. The test papers were hand-scored by me as soon as possible so that the results could affect the nature of the rest of the visit. Many primary-grade classrooms were observed during reading instruction. Any remedial reading programs for primary-grade children were observed. The principal, other administrators, teachers, and reading specialists were interviewed. In some cases other personnel, such as psychologists and teachers of English as a second language, were interviewed or observed.

General Results

Six of the 17 schools that were visited and tested met the inner-city criterion but not the reading-success criterion. Seven of the schools met the reading-success criterion but not the inner-city criterion. Four met both criteria, in my opinion, beyond any doubt. First, they were non-selective public schools in the central areas of large cities that were attended by very poor children. Second, at the third-grade level, their reading achievement medians equalled or exceeded the national norm and the percentages of non-readers were unusually low for such schools. These schools were P.S. 11 in Manhattan, the John H. Finley School (P.S. 129) in Manhattan, the Woodland School in Kansas City, Missouri, and the Ann Street School in Los Angeles. The next section describes in some detail these schools and their successful beginning reading programs.

THE FOUR SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

In the following descriptions of the four inner-city schools that were found to be notably successful in teaching beginning reading, there will be no detailed discussion of their individual reading achievement scores. All four of them had achievements far above the typical inner-city school, and the differences among them were relatively slight. Accordingly, they are listed in an arbitrary order: first the two schools in Manhattan, arranged in numerical order, and then, moving west, the school in Kansas City and the school in Los Angeles. This arrangement does not, to repeat, indicate any order of quality; they are all outstanding in beginning reading in comparison to most inner-city schools.

To illustrate their general level of achievement, I have developed the following table.

	% of Third Grade Not Tested (absent or non-English)	Percentages of Third-Graders Tested Receiving Various Grade-Equivalent Scores				
		Non-Reader	I	II	III	IV & Up
Typical High-Income Schools (estimated)	5-15	0-5	0-5	3-10	3-10	72-92
Typical Average-Income Schools (estimated)	5-15	10-20	10-20	10-20	10-20	30-50
The Four Successful Inner-City Schools (actual)	12-20	7-14	6-12	13-23	16-21	42-46
Typical Inner-City Schools (estimated)	10-25	25-35	5-30	10-25	10-20	15-25

The third line shows the four successful schools. The first figure shows the percentage of all third-graders that were not tested, either because they were absent or because they did not speak English. The remaining figures show the distribution of the third-grade children tested in terms of their national norm reading grade equivalents. Even though the "non-readers" may have known some individual words, for all practical purposes they were unable to read. For comparison with these scores for the four successful schools, I have estimated, on the basis of my testing in 18 other schools, comparable figures for typical inner-city schools, typical average-income schools,

and typical high-income schools. The table shows that *the achievement of the four successful inner-city schools is approximately that of typical average-income schools.*

The first column means that in the four successful inner-city schools, 12 to 20 per cent of the third-graders enrolled were not tested. It is estimated that typical inner-city schools would be in approximately the same range. Typical average-income and high-income schools would show a lower figure, partly because they have far fewer third-graders who do not speak English, partly because their average absence rate is lower.

Turning to the reading achievement scores, the greatest visible differences, naturally, are in the two extreme achievement categories: non-readers and fourth-grade-and-higher. In the four successful inner-city schools, 7 to 14 per cent of the third-graders tested were non-readers. This is substantially better than the 25 to 35 per cent that one would find in typical inner-city schools. It is approximately the result one would find in typical average-income schools, if one makes an adjustment for the higher absence rate of the successful inner-city schools. It is significantly poorer than what one would find in typical high-income schools. On the other extreme, in the four successful inner-city schools 42 to 46 per cent of the third-graders tested scored fourth grade or higher on a national norm basis. This is substantially better than the 15 to 25 per cent that one would find in typical inner-city schools. It is roughly what one would find in typical average-income schools (30-50%), but far below what one would find in typical high-income schools (72-92%). (For a comment on why typical high-income schools have higher achievement in beginning reading than even these successful inner-city schools, see Appendix 2.)

With this understanding of just how well the four successful inner-city schools did in beginning reading achievement, we will turn to a description of the four successful schools and their programs.

P.S. 11, MANHATTAN

320 West 21st Street
New York, New York 10011
Murray A. Goldberg, Principal

Manhattan's P.S. 11 is in Chelsea, fairly far down on the island's west side. The school area is bounded by 16th Street on the south, 26th Street on the north, the Hudson River on the west, and Fifth Avenue on the east. The school itself, on 21st Street between Eighth

and Ninth Avenues, is an old building on a treeless lot among tenements, shops, and housing developments. The building, constructed in 1925, had a million-dollar renovation in 1963 which improved the interior, particularly the classrooms, but left it with black-floored, dark corridors and old steel staircases.

There are 750 pupils in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Ten years ago the school had 1,200, but widespread demolition and urban renewal led to a lower enrollment. With available space, P.S. 11 became one of the More Effective Schools five years ago. The More Effective Schools program, boosted by the American Federation of Teachers and initiated by its New York affiliate, has smaller classes as its key feature. Accordingly, to be chosen for the program, a school had to have the space to reorganize its pupils into a greater number of classes. Instead of the pupil-teacher ratio of 31:1 in the majority of New York's elementary schools or the 28:1 in the Special Service schools, MES schools have a ratio of 22:1. Last spring P.S. 11 had 120 pupils enrolled in its third grade. Of these, 112 were in five regular classes (a ratio of 22.4:1) and eight were in a "junior guidance" (disciplinary) class. Counting all six classes, the ratio was 20.0:1.

In addition to the smaller classes, the MES program provides the school with supplementary "cluster teachers" (a fourth teacher for every three classes), more supervisory and auxiliary personnel (for example, three assistant principals), and pre-kindergartens. The MES program requires heterogeneous grouping. The cluster teachers visit each of their three classes for one-and-a-half hours a day. In the primary grades, this is usually during the reading period. The cluster teacher sometimes instructs the whole class, sometimes takes part of the class while the regular teacher takes the other.

The limited number of MES schools in New York City were chosen primarily on the basis of their having enough space for the smaller class sizes. Of the 27 MES schools, 24 are in disadvantaged areas and would be in the Special Service category if they were not MES. P.S. 11 is such a school. Eighty per cent of its pupils qualify for free lunch. Twenty per cent enter school not knowing English, and 30 per cent more enter knowing English from Spanish-speaking homes. In total, about half of the pupils are Puerto Rican, 17 per cent are black, and the remaining third are "other." Almost all are very poor.

P.S. 11 is a clean and orderly and business-like school. The atmosphere is purposeful and optimistic. Mr. Goldberg, who has been

principal for 14 years, runs a "tight ship." He seems to know and care about everything that goes on in the school. His office is very well organized, and facts and figures are, if not in his head, usually within his arm's reach.

P.S. 11 has no single reading program. Eight or nine sets of reading materials are available in the school. The teachers have wide latitude in choosing among these and in ordering new materials, although purchases must be approved by the assistant principal responsible for the particular grade. Among the materials I saw being used in the primary grades were the Scott, Foresman basals, the Bank Street readers, the *We Are Black* series by Science Research Associates, SRA's reading laboratory, the Scholastic Library of paperbacks, the McCormick-Mathers phonics workbooks, *Phonics We Use* (published by Lyons and Carnahan), *Standard Test Lessons in Reading* by McCall and Crabbs (published by Teachers College), and various games and teacher-made materials. In addition, there was a large quantity and variety of storybooks. Every classroom had its own library of these, and in addition a large school library seemed to be extensively used. Children could take books home for a week at a time.

There is a strong emphasis on reading without its taking over the whole primary-grade curriculum. From one-and-a-half to two hours a day are spent in reading instruction in the regular classes. About 20 per cent of the children in grades three, four, and five (the ones who are doing poorest in reading) spend an additional hour and a half a week (two 45-minute sessions) with a specialized reading teacher, who takes them in groups of about six. She uses a large variety of phonics materials not used in the regular classrooms. Her work, and the classroom teachers' as well, focuses on individualization. The reading specialist's individualization is formal, starting out with a careful diagnosis of where the pupil is; the classroom teachers' individualization is informal but nevertheless brings to bear an attitude that different children are at various stages of learning to read and have to be treated differently. This individualization is encouraged by the heterogeneous nature of the classes. The heterogeneous assignment is done very carefully and consciously in P.S. 11. For example, at the end of the second grade, all pupils are ranked by teachers in terms of reading achievement. Then the children are assigned to third-grade classes by random distribution of each of the various achievement groups.

Although the school does not use in the regular classrooms any basal series with a strong phonics approach, there are many phonics workbooks and supplemental materials in use. Much of the teaching and teacher-made materials center around phonics. This emphasis dates from the principal's reading, three years ago, of the book by Jeanne Chall *(Learning to Read: The Great Debate)*. The book made a profound impression on him, he says, and he called his teachers together to urge them to use more phonics. Before that time, the feeling in the school was somewhat anti-phonics, to the point where some teachers felt that they had to "bootleg" the use of phonics.

In line with the MES guidelines, there are no special classes for children from Spanish-speaking homes. In fact, there is a conscious effort to mix such children into all classes. There is a "bilingual teacher" who conducts an orientation program for Spanish-speaking children and their parents. But she does not teach English.

There are four "junior guidance" classes in the school. Such classes have existed in the New York City schools for about ten years. They are made up of pupils who are disruptive in the regular classrooms. At P.S. 11, the four junior guidance classes are at the second-, third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade levels. Children are assigned to them, with parental approval, on the principal's decision, which is based on the recommendations of counselors and classroom teachers. The policy is to keep them no more than two years before they are returned to the regular classrooms, and many return sooner. The eight boys in the third-grade group were a mixture of those who "acted out" and those who were withdrawn. Their reading attainment ranged from low to high. Their teacher was a man.

Homework is given at all levels at P.S. 11. The amount varies, and the teachers have considerable latitude in its assignment, but the policy of giving it is built into the school program.

P.S. 11, being an MES school, has unusually small classes. It has also had extra personnel and pre-kindergarten for five years, which would mean that the third-graders tested had full benefit, in most cases, of these advantages. But there is more to P.S. 11's success in beginning reading than those factors. If there were not, all disadvantaged MES schools would be equally successful—and most of them are not. At P.S. 11 there is the order and purpose of a well-run school. High expectations and concern for every pupil are reflected in many things, including the atmosphere of individualization. Most of all, there is an obvious emphasis on early reading achievement and the importance given to phonics instruction.

JOHN H. FINLEY SCHOOL (P.S. 129), MANHATTAN
425 West 130th Street
New York, New York 10027
Mrs. Martha Froelich, Principal

The John H. Finley School, built in 1957, is at 130th Street and Convent Avenue in northwest Harlem, several blocks south of City College, with which it is affiliated in a demonstration, research, and teacher education program. Most new teachers at the school come from City College. The district, made up of tenements and housing projects, is bounded by 125th Street on the south and southwest, 131st Street on the north, Broadway on the northwest, and St. Nicholas Terrace on the east.

There are 980 pupils in kindergarten through sixth grade. Finley is a Special Service School, one of about 40 per cent of the New York City elementary schools so categorized because they serve disadvantaged children. At Finley, the poverty of the children is evidenced by the fact that almost all of them qualify for free lunch. Seventy per cent of the children are black, about 30 per cent Spanish-speaking. Being a Special Service School, its pupil-teacher ratio is supposed to be no higher than 28:1. Last spring Finley had 133 pupils in five third-grade classes for a ratio of 26.6:1.

The school is orderly and has a confident and optimistic air. Mrs. Froelich, who has been principal for 11 years, is a no-nonsense leader who is also friendly and kind. Often out in the halls and dealing with individual children, she seems to be always available to children, teachers, parents, and others on school business.

The reading program through the second grade is well planned, uniform, and highly structured. It was started in 1962.[1] There is no formal reading program in the kindergarten, but there is a formal program involving the acquisition of fundamental knowledge and concepts. A checklist of 21 items is used. Some of the items are "writes first name," "knows colors," "counts to ten," and "understands concept more/less." When the children enter in September, each child is checked against the list and a record made. During the year deficiencies are made up.

During the first half of the first grade, there is no achievement grouping. Reading time is devoted to work charts and experience

[1] For an earlier account of the reading program by persons connected with the school, see "Success for Disadvantaged Children," by Martha Froelich, Florence Kaiden Blitzer and Judith W. Greenberg, *The Reading Teacher*, October 1967.

stories. Work charts of various kinds are posted around the room to indicate the children's chores and class activities. These are read aloud during the day. The experience stories are made up from the children's talk. They are rexographed, and each child builds his own reader by pasting them in a hard-covered notebook. On the pages with the experience stories are homework, which begins the very first day of first grade (and continues on an every-night basis), and word patterns to teach what Mrs. Froelich calls "intrinsic phonics." Here are two examples of such patterns:

sn	eat
snake	eat
snail	beat
snack	heat
	meat
	seat
	wheat

At the beginning of the second half of the first grade, children are grouped by reading attainment. This is done by a reading coordinator as part of a systematic program of reading evaluation. The reading coordinator tests every child once a month during the first grade and every six weeks during the second grade by means of a modified Harris Test. This test consists of eight graded lists of ten words each. All testing is done on an individual basis by the reading coordinator, and the words are not known to the classroom teachers. The child reads the words aloud, starting with the easiest list. The child is placed at the level where he first fails to read more than four words out of the list of ten. (The test is also used to place new children coming into the school.) Administration of the test takes less than ten minutes per child.

During the second half of the first grade the children read for a half-hour per day in homogeneous groups determined by this placement. For this half-hour children go to another classroom, if necessary, to join their assigned groups. They read various basals with the teacher in an orthodox instructional situation. An unusual aspect of the reading program is their independent reading. Finley has organized a large number of storybooks and textbooks from preprimers through second-grade level and higher into a sequence of difficulty that has been determined by the school's own experience. A book may be lower or higher on the school list than the publisher's designation. There are 14 books on the first pre-primer level, ten on the second pre-primer level, 17 on the third pre-primer level, seven

on the primer level, and so forth. Each child reads these books at his own pace. After finishing each book, he completes a worksheet of questions on it. He may not read all the books at one level before he goes on to the next, but a prodigious amount of reading is done.

Roughly the same procedure is followed in the second grade. But at the beginning of the year, the children are assigned to classes on the basis of their progress in reading. The book reading continues, but on a class basis rather than on an individual basis. Again, the number of books covered is very large, in sharp contrast with the typical second-grade class elsewhere, which is kept to a single basal and possibly a supplemental book or two. The pace is suggested by the fact that one second-grade class I observed was asked to read an entire short storybook and study all the new words for a single night's homework. In the second grade, phonics is covered by the *Phonics We Use* workbooks, published by Lyons and Carnahan.

Going into the third grade, the children are again grouped on the basis of their progress in reading. The third-grade classes this past year were using a variety of commercially published and teacher-made materials. Many trade books were involved in individual work.

For children whose native language is Spanish, there is a bilingual teacher who works with one, two or three pupils at a time, three times a week. She had a total of 29 children last spring.

Five features of the reading program stand out: all of the pupils are started out in the same way in heterogeneous classes in the first half of the first grade; individualization and grouping on the basis of reading progress begins in the second half of the first grade; careful and frequent evaluation is done by someone outside the classsroom; a very large quantity and variety of materials is used; and phonics, both implicit and explicit, is taught in the first two grades. This planned, precise reading program benefits from a general school atmosphere that includes high expectations, a concern for every child, and considerable home involvement through homework and school-home communications.

WOODLAND SCHOOL
711 Woodland Avenue
Kansas City, Missouri 64106
Don Joslin, Principal

Woodland School is a couple of miles northeast of the center of Kansas City in a black district. Built in 1921, it sits on a large lot in the middle of an urban renewal area, a lot that includes a

playground, outbuildings, and a parking area. Nearby are small houses and a large, high-rise housing project.

There are about 650 pupils in kindergarten through seventh grade. Before urban renewal demolished so many buildings there had been 1,200 pupils. Ninety-nine per cent of the children are black; almost all of them are very poor. About 90 per cent get free or largely free lunch.

Last school year (1970-71) was the second year as principal for Don Joslin. Previously he had been principal of another Title I school. Mr. Joslin believes in the power of cooperation, and he often deals with pupils in terms of asking them for "help."

Classes are relatively large. Last spring each of the three regular third-grade classes (one was a combined class of third- and fourth-graders) had 29 pupils. A special education class for second- and third-graders had 14. Including that class, the pupil-teacher ratio for the third grade was 25.3:1.

Woodland School is part of a multi-school program, Project Uplift. The driving force behind this project is a black man, Robert R. Wheeler, area superintendent for the Division of Urban Education. Mr. Wheeler served with the Kansas City schools before he went to Oakland, California, for three years. When he returned to Kansas City in 1966, he was determined to improve the reading achievement of children in the inner city. "We began," he has said, "with the fundamental belief that inner-city pupils can learn as well as other pupils, provided the priorities are sensible, the effort intense, and the instructional approaches rational in terms of the needs of the learners. We have not accepted the myth that environmental factors develop unalterable learning depression. We believe that so-called negative environmental factors can be overcome with sensitive and responsive teaching." And so, in the fall of 1968, when the educational establishment was contending that slum children were permanently disadvantaged and, in Mr. Wheeler's words, "needed more zoo trips or didn't have enough oatmeal," he began a program that emphasized beginning reading skills.

The program included reading and speech specialists in each school, teacher aides, and a change from traditional whole-word basals to the Sullivan Programmed Reading Series, published by McGraw-Hill. In-service training of teachers was crucial because staff expectations about pupil potential had to be raised. As Mr. Wheeler put it, "The staff has to believe the pupils can and will learn before they can convince the students that they are not doomed to fail."

Project Uplift involves 11 elementary schools. I visited only one, but I was told that several other project schools had results at least as good in beginning reading. Although I will describe the beginning reading program at Woodland, that program can be understood only in terms of the spirit and objectives of the whole project.

The heart of the beginning reading program at Woodland is the Sullivan readers. These are the McGraw-Hill version (a similar Sullivan series is also published by Behavioral Research Laboratories). This series is "programmed"; that is, it is designed for use by the pupil working by himself. It consists of 21 paperbound, graded booklets, nominally intended for the first three grades. The first seven booklets are at first-grade level, the second seven at second-grade level, the last seven at third-grade level. But of course they can, and should, be used on an individualized basis. Each child begins with the first book and proceeds as fast or as slowly as he masters the material. Each page is divided into two sections. The larger one presents questions or problems in the form of statements to be completed with one answer or another. The smaller section lists the correct answers. This section is covered by the child with a cardboard "slider," which is moved down to reveal the answers one at a time. Typically, the child works by himself and has his work checked by the teacher or someone else after every page. At the end of each book he takes a test on the whole book. A major problem with such young children is to establish and maintain a routine of self-discipline so that the child actually works in the way that he is supposed to. Obviously children could cheat by working from the answers to the questions. I have been in schools where so much of this is done that the program is ineffective.

At Woodland the program seemed to be implemented quite well. There was very little cheating or racing to see who could finish his book first. Every primary-grade class had a full-time teacher aide who, of course, helped with the Sullivan work. There was a considerable spread within classes with respect to which books the children were reading, a situation which testified to the individualization of the program. From one-and-a-half to two hours per day were devoted to working with the books. From 20 to 30 minutes per day were used for group instruction on decoding skills. If a child did not finish Book 21 by the time he completed third grade, he continued with the series into the fourth grade and even into the fifth, if necessary, until he finished. Within grades, classes were roughly grouped by reading attainment. The Sullivan program began in

1968-69, and so the third grade this past spring was the first third grade at the school to have begun the program in the first grade.

The Sullivan program has built into it a regular procedure of individual evaluation, the page and end-of-book checks. Even if this is implemented with only moderate competence, the resulting reading evaluation system is far superior to that typically carried out in the primary classes of our public schools.

Woodland, like other Project Uplift schools, has a full-time "speech improvement" teacher. She spends 20 to 25 minutes twice a week in each of the classes from kindergarten through fourth grade. She uses a variety of techniques, including children's plays and oral reports to class, to improve pupils' verbal facility so that youngsters can move from the neighborhood dialect to the English used in the classroom.

The school has two full-time reading specialists, one of whom is assigned to kindergarten through grade three, the other to grades four through seven. These specialists do not teach the children outside of the classroom. Their duties include in-service work with the classroom teachers, demonstrations in the classroom, and general monitoring of the reading program.

The school has a library which children visit regularly once a week. They may borrow books to take back to use in the classroom, but they may not take books home.

Woodland has a state-aided program of special education. There are three classes: one for second and third grades, one for fourth and fifth, and one for sixth and seventh. Assignment to the classes is considered for children with a Stanford-Binet score of 79 I.Q. or lower. Some children who test this low are able to keep up in regular classes and remain there. Before assignment to a special education class, parents' approval is secured. Last spring 12 third-graders were in the special education class. Although the children had worked in the Sullivan series when they were in the regular classes, in the special education class they used a whole-word basal series. Out of the ten tested third-graders who were non-readers, seven were in the special education class.

The most important factors in Woodland's success in beginning reading instruction are the high expectations and the use of the McGraw-Hill Sullivan program. The considerable time devoted to reading is another factor. The reading and speech specialists and the teacher aides round out the picture. The special education classes are probably, on balance, a negative factor. While special education

classes can benefit both the children assigned to them and the regular classes from which they come, the Woodland program does not seem to do so.

ANN STREET SCHOOL
126 East Bloom Street
Los Angeles, California 90012
Mrs. Joyce D. Zikas, Principal

Ann Street School is in a very low-income area in the center of Los Angeles, about ten blocks northeast of City Hall. The school building, erected about 1955, and its playground occupy a small block entirely surrounded by a housing project.

There are 406 pupils in kindergarten through sixth grade. Sixty-two per cent of the children are Mexican-American; 38 per cent are black. All of the pupils live in the William Mead Homes, a housing project of two- and three-story buildings where rent is as low as $29 per month. Out of 435 elementary schools in the Los Angeles school system, only 55 are Title I. Ann Street is one of these. All of the children are eligible for both free breakfast and free lunch. During the past year, from one-quarter to one-half of the pupils took free breakfast; all took free lunch.

Mrs. Zikas came to the school as principal four years ago. Her first problem, as she saw it, was to establish order in the building and to create a level of discipline that would facilitate learning. Having accomplished that, she turned to the curriculum.

Classes are relatively small. The nominal pupil-teacher ratio is 24:1. The school has a non-graded primary organization covering grades one through three. Of the ten primary classes last spring, three were composed entirely of pupils in their first year after kindergarten (K-plus-1), two were mixtures of K-plus-1 and K-plus-2, one was K-plus-2, one was a mixture of K-plus-2 and K-plus-3, one was K-plus-3, and two were mixtures of K-plus-3 and K-plus-4. A child may take three or four years to complete the primary-grade program.

The primary classes operate on a "divided day." Half the children in a class come to school from nine o'clock to two o'clock; the other half come from ten to three. This allows two hours a day (from nine to ten and two to three) in which only half the class is present. It is these two hours that are used for the chief reading instruction.

Beginning with the year 1969-70, no report cards have been given to primary-grade children. Instead, parent conferences are held three times a year. The idea at the time that this procedure was decided

upon was that the children were doing so poorly that honest grades would discourage both them and their parents. Now that achievement has risen, report cards may be reinstituted.

In some cases teachers stay with a class more than one year. Last spring one teacher was teaching the same class for the third straight year, from kindergarten through "second grade."

The school has two classes for mentally retarded children of 15 pupils each. The children must be eight years old and test below 80 I.Q. on a Stanford-Binet or Wechsler individual intelligence test.

There are also two "opportunity classes" for disciplinary problems. Most of these children are in the upper grades. The class for fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade has 15 pupils. The primary class has six pupils.

A student council is very active. An unusual feature is a series of school-wide "commissioners" in addition to the councilmen who represent the various grades. Many of the 17 commissioners are for non-academic matters such as safety, but there are several commissioners in the academic fields, including handwriting, mathematics, and reading. The student Commissioner of Reading Improvement makes regular reports on reading progress to the weekly student council assembly. At the same meeting, she may well ask skill questions of the student audience. There is also a student School Improvement Committee that deals with school discipline.

The reading program at the primary level consists largely of the McGraw-Hill Sullivan series. Since this series has been described above in connection with its use at Woodland School in Kansas City, it will not be described again here. At Ann Street the Sullivan program was begun in November 1969 in the whole primary bloc. After the Sullivan pre-reading program, the pupils enter the 21-booklet series. Nominally Books 1 through 16 are covered in the primary grades, and Books 17 through 21 are used in the fourth grade and later as supplementary reading. But in practice the series is used, as it was intended, on an individualized basis, and this past spring some "third-graders" had progressed as far as Book 19 and some were as far back as Book 4. The children can take the Sullivan books home if they wish.

Each primary class has either two teachers or a teacher and an aide. With the divided-day arrangement described above, the child-adult ratio during the Sullivan instruction can be quite low.

In addition to the Sullivan series, a variety of other materials is used in the later primary period. Chief of these is the Science Research Associates reading laboratory, which is typically begun by

the child when he reaches Book 10 of Sullivan. Other materials being used this past spring included *Speech-to-Print Phonics, Open Highways* (published by Scott, Foresman), storybooks and library books.

There is a full-time reading specialist provided by the state's Miller-Unruh Act. Until this past year, there were two. The specialist (Mrs. Dorothy A. Brumbaugh) works with the primary group only, both in the regular classroom and with the teachers. There is no pupil instruction outside of the classroom. The reading specialist has developed two diagnostic tests that are related to the Sullivan series, one for Books 1-7, the other for Books 8-14. These group tests are administered three times a year. The results of the tests, in the form of a chart showing the skills that each child has mastered, are posted in the classrooms.

Beginning in December 1970, the school has had a teacher who teaches English as a second language. She works with pupils in groups of 8 to 15 and has 49 pupils in all. A bilingual teacher who teaches in both English and Spanish, she meets with each group for 45 minutes every day, at a time when the children would be studying a subject other than reading in their regular classrooms. The children are grouped, whatever their age, according to their proficiency in English.

The school consciously instructs its pupils in the mechanics of test-taking. It tests the children frequently, using a variety of tests.

There are many factors, as one can see, that might account for the success in beginning reading at Ann Street. Chief among these, in my opinion, are the Sullivan series, the excellent and imaginative work of the reading specialist, the ambitious efforts of the principal, and the stress that is placed on reading achievement.

CONCLUSIONS

The hypothesis of this research project was proven. At least four inner-city public schools exist in the United States where reading achievement in the early grades is far higher than in most inner-city schools. Specifically, the four schools described in the preceding section are all non-selective public schools in the central areas of large cities and are attended by very poor children. Further, during the second half of the school year 1970-71 all four schools had reading achievement medians in third grade which equalled or exceeded the national norm and a percentage of non-readers unusually low for such schools.

The four successful schools, it should be noted, are not perfect schools, even with respect to their beginning reading programs. But they merit attention and commendation because they are doing something that very few inner-city schools do: teaching beginning reading well.

Success Factors

Now that we have found four inner-city schools that teach beginning reading well, the inevitable question arises: How do they do it? What are their secrets of success? It is not easy to be sure of the answer because schools are very complex institutions. The mere fact that a successful school is doing something different from unsuccessful schools does not mean that the different practice is the cause of success. The matter is made more complicated because successful schools always seem to do *many* things differently. Which of these different practices are responsible for the higher pupil achievement? It is, of course, impossible to be certain, but it seems reasonable to assume that when all four successful schools are following a practice not usually found in unsuccessful inner-city schools, that practice has something to do with their success. It seems reasonable, also, to conclude that different practices that exist in some of the successful schools, but not in others, are not essential to success. I will use this approach in trying to account for the success of the four inner-city schools in teaching beginning reading.

There seem to be eight factors that are common to the four successful schools that are usually not present in unsuccessful inner-city

schools. These are—not, of course, in the order of their importance—strong leadership, high expectations, good atmosphere, strong emphasis on reading, additional reading personnel, use of phonics, individualization, and careful evaluation of pupil progress.

Strong leadership is not surprising. But it was striking that all four schools have clearly identifiable individuals who would be regarded as outstanding leaders by most people who are knowledgeable about our public schools. In three cases, these individuals are principals: Mr. Goldberg at P.S. 11, Mrs. Froelich at the John H. Finley School, and Mrs. Zikas at the Ann Street School. In the fourth case, the leader is Mr. Wheeler, the area superintendent responsible for Woodland and ten other schools in Kansas City. (Mr. Joslin, the principal at Woodland, appears to be an effective administrator, but he did not supply the initiative for the reading program.) In all four instances, these persons have not only been the leaders of the over-all school activity but have specifically led the beginning reading program. A new reading program, if it is to succeed, has to be inaugurated with conscious purpose but also has to be followed up to see that it keeps on a productive course.

All four schools have had high expectations with regard to the potential achievements of their inner-city children. Understandably, this is a prerequisite to success; if these schools had believed that their pupils could achieve no better in reading than inner-city children usually do, they would hardly have worked so hard for better performance. But high hopes are only a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for success. As important as the level of aspiration is, if that were all there were to it, many more schools would succeed in these days of concern for the inner-city child.

The good atmosphere of these schools is hard to describe. And yet it is difficult to escape the conviction that the order, sense of purpose, relative quiet, and pleasure in learning of these schools play a role in their achievements. Disorder, noise, tension, and confusion are found in many inner-city schools at the elementary level. I have been in schools where such conditions prevail, but, over-all, the four successful schools were quite different.

It may go without saying that these schools place a strong emphasis on reading. And yet in these days of television, of many new media in the schools, and of a widespread interest in the "affective" side of learning, in many inner-city schools reading seems to be only one subject of many. While these four successful schools do not, of course, concentrate all their attention on reading, they do recognize

that reading is the first concern of the primary grades. This strong emphasis on reading is reflected in many ways.

All four schools have additional reading personnel. All four schools have reading specialists working with the primary grades. In addition, P.S. 11 has the extra number of regular teachers to allow for the small class size and "cluster teachers" (a fourth teacher for every three classes) who serve primarily as reading teachers; Woodland has a full-time teacher aide for each class and a speech specialist; and the Ann Street School has a second teacher or a teacher aide for each primary class. These additional personnel serve two functions. The specialists bring expertise and concentration to the reading program. The other personnel allow the pupil-adult ratio to be reduced during reading instruction. This approach is probably more effective than using the same amount of money to reduce class size, a matter that is discussed below.

The use of phonics is important. By this time, more than three years after the publication of Jeanne Chall's book, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate,* there is a widespread recognition of the superiority of the phonics, or decoding, approach. But recognition and implementation are two different things. Many teachers are not sufficiently knowledgeable about phonics to teach it, and it requires particularly knowledgeable teachers to use the phonics approach with materials that do not have the phonics built in. Of the four schools, two use the Sullivan program, which does have the phonics approach built in. The other two schools use non-phonics readers as their basic books, but have supplemented them with extensive phonics materials. All four schools are using phonics to a much greater degree than most inner-city schools.

The seventh success factor is individualization. By this I do not mean, necessarily, individualization in the narrow sense of having each child work at a different level. I mean that there is a concern for each child's progress and a willingness to modify a child's work assignments, if necessary, to take account of his stage of learning to read and his particular learning problems. The Sullivan program, used by two of the four schools, allows and even encourages individualization. In the other two schools, individualization is achieved by other methods. At P.S. 11, the great variety of materials and the extensive use of library books facilitate individualization. At the John H. Finley School, the whole system of evaluation, assignment, and use of the large list of reading books is involved. At all four schools, individualization is, of course, partly a matter of attitude and approach.

The last factor that seems to account for these schools' success is careful evaluation of pupil progress. Here again, the Sullivan program, if properly implemented, has this evaluation built in. Each child's work is checked after each page or two and again after the end of each book. In addition, the Ann Street School has the excellent diagnostic tests developed by the school reading specialist. At P.S. 11, the heterogeneous grouping of the classes requires careful evaluation in connection with individualization and annual assignment. At the John H. Finley School, a frequent evaluation of pupil progress is made by the reading coordinator by means of the modified Harris Test. In addition, there is evaluation by means of checking on each book read and evaluation for the purpose of achievement grouping for second- and third-grade classes.

In addition to these success factors, a word should be said about the age of these successful beginning reading programs. In no case was the success achieved in a year, or even in two years. This fact should serve as a warning to schools who hope to do the job in a year. In the case of P.S. 11, the approximate age of the beginning reading program in its present form is three years. At John H. Finley, it is nine years! At Woodland, it is three years. At the Ann Street School, the Sullivan program has been used only two years, but many of the features of the beginning reading program date back four years, to the time when the principal came to the school.

Non-essential Characteristics

Turning from success factors, let us look at some characteristics often thought important to improved achievement in beginning reading that are *not* common to these four successful schools. Some of these characteristics may, indeed, be important to the success of one or more of the four schools, but they apparently are not essential to success or it is reasonable to assume that they would be present in all four.

First is small class size. P.S. 11 is the only one of the four schools that has unusually small classes, about 22. Ann Street averages about 24, John H. Finley about 27, and Woodland a relatively high 29. School systems often spend large sums of money to reduce class size, even by such small numbers as two or three pupils. This study strongly suggests that such sums, if spent at all, could be better used in other ways. One of the obvious alternatives is additional personnel, described above as one of the "success factors."

Second is achievement grouping. Although achievement grouping or grouping by presumed ability may facilitate success in beginning reading instruction, if it were necessary to such success it would be hard to account for the success at P.S. 11, where under the MES program there is an extensive effort to make all classes heterogeneous. The other three schools use some kind of homogeneous grouping.

Third is the quality of teaching. No one writing about the schools can ignore the importance of good teachers. Naturally any program is better by virtue of its being implemented by good teachers. The better the teachers, the better the chances of success. But the relevant point here is that not one of the four schools had, in the primary grades, a group of teachers all of whom were outstanding. The teachers seemed to be, on the whole, above average in competence but not strikingly so. This is an important point because outstanding teachers can teach beginning reading successfully with *any* materials and under a wide range of conditions. At the other extreme, poor teachers will fail with the best materials and procedures. The four successful schools probably were somewhat favored by the quality of their teaching, but some mediocre and even poor teaching was observed.

Fourth is the ethnic background of the principals and teachers. Today there is considerable attention being paid to the ethnic identification of school personnel. Some community groups are trying to secure teachers and principals of the same ethnic group (black, Mexican-American, etc.) as the majority of the pupils in the school. Although it cannot be denied that in some cases this effort may be of educational value, it is interesting to note that the leaders of these four schools were, in all but one case, not members of the ethnic group predominant in the school's pupil population. The one exception was Mr. Wheeler in Kansas City, who is black. But there the principal of Woodland, where almost all of the pupils are black, is a white man. A similar observation can be made about the teachers: although some of them belong to the same ethnic group as is represented in the school, many do not. This study would suggest that there are far more important matters than the ethnic background of the administrators and teachers in achieving success in beginning reading instruction.

The fifth characteristic is the existence of preschool education. Today it is often argued that early formal training is extremely important—even the key—to success in the education of inner-city children. This study does not support that argument. While the successful third grade at P.S. 11 had had, for the most part, a pre-

kindergarten experience, almost all children in the other three schools had not. Of course, this is not to say that early training would not help inner-city children, merely that only a small minority of the children in these four successful schools had had such training.

A last characteristic worth noting has to do with physical facilities. Not one of the four schools looked like the ultra-modern buildings so lauded in some of the school magazines. In fact, two of the buildings (P.S. 11 and Woodland) were noticeably old. And all of the buildings were basically what is derisively called by some people "eggcrate" in nature. Without denying that new buildings are nice, this study suggests that many other factors (some of which are far less costly) are much more important in achieving reading success in the primary grades.

Summary

Reading achievement in the early grades in almost all inner-city schools is both relatively and absolutely low. This project has identified four notable exceptions. Their success shows that the failure in beginning reading typical of inner-city schools is the fault not of the children or their background—but of the schools. None of the successes was achieved overnight; they required from three to nine years. The factors that seem to account for the success of the four schools are strong leadership, high expectations, good atmosphere, strong emphasis on reading, additional reading personnel, use of phonics, individualization, and careful evaluation of pupil progress. On the other hand, some characteristics often thought of as important to school improvement were *not* essential to the success of the four schools: small class size, achievement grouping, high quality of teaching, school personnel of the same ethnic background as the pupils', preschool education, and outstanding physical facilities.

Appendix 1

THE TEST USED TO DETERMINE READING ABILITY

In order to determine the reading ability of the third-grade children in the inner-city schools surveyed in this project, an original written test was developed. The test was intentionally designed to be different in form from the nationally standardized reading tests used at this level. There were several reasons for this. First, any test similar to the nationally standardized tests would have favored children who had had more experience (through either test-taking or coaching) with such tests. Secondly, a test was desired that used a vocabulary completely or almost completely familiar by ear to third-grade children of all backgrounds, particularly inner-city environments. Much of the vocabulary used on nationally standardized tests is not familiar to such children.[1] Thirdly, a test was desired that did not use the multiple-choice format, since such a format might encourage guessing, which is not penalized in scoring the nationally standardized tests.

The approach used was that of the Basic Test of Reading Comprehension, an unpublished test by S. Alan Cohen and Robert Cloward described on pages 67-69 of *Teach Them All To Read* by S. Alan Cohen (Random House, 1969). After a draft was developed, it was tested on 445 third-grade children of different backgrounds who scored from illiterate to eighth-grade level on a nationally standardized test, and on 31 very low fifth-graders. As part of this trial, many of the individual words were checked for comprehension by having a series of children try to read the words in isolation. Checks were then made to assure that the children understood the meaning of the words, whether or not they could read them. Inasmuch as the test involved inevitably a "logic load," this was minimized by an item analysis. The draft items that were missed most frequently by children who had very high scores on the over-all test were assumed to be missed, not because the children could not read and understand the

[1] Indeed, the tests are constructed on the assumption that breadth of listening vocabulary is an indicator of reading skill. This assumption is a valid one at junior-high, high-school, and college levels of reading skill, but not at the primary level. Its use puts most inner-city children and many other children at a disadvantage.

words but because the logic was too difficult. On this basis, 11 items in the draft test were dropped. An additional item analysis was made to see if the items distinguished between poor readers, average readers, and good readers. Using three such groups of third-graders made up on the basis of their scores on a nationally standardized test, every one of the 32 items in the final version of the test was confirmed for its validity. That is, in every case a higher percentage of the good-reader group answered the item correctly than did the average-reader group, and a higher percentage of the average-reader group than the poor-reader group.

The final version of the test was "easy" in three senses: it was constructed with vocabulary familiar by ear to the children; it had a very low logic requirement; and the mechanics of taking it were simple. In every one of the ten inner-city schools surveyed, at least 19 per cent of the third-grade children tested obtained perfect or nearly perfect scores.

The test contained 32 items of approximately equal difficulty from the point of view of listening vocabulary and logic. The items were not of equal difficulty from the point of view of reading skill because some contained more words that required decoding skill, that is, words infrequently or never taught as such in the beginning reading materials typically used. Examples of such words were *dime, dirty,* and *Pepsi-Cola.* The items were generally mixed in order of difficulty, although several of the easiest questions were grouped at the beginning.

Reproduced below are three examples from the final version of the test. Each contains, near the end, a word that does not belong in the context. Although a perfectly good word in isolation, it doesn't fit. In order to identify this word, the child usually has to be able to read not only that word but many of the rest of the words in the item. The child merely has to find the "wrong" word and strike it out.

3. Tonight Nancy is sick. She has a bad cold. Tomorrow she will stay in bed and not green to school.
9. Jane went to the store to buy some sugar. The price was more money than she had. She had to come back sweet to get some more.
14. Many boys like to play baseball. When they bat, they try very hard to drink the ball and get to first base.

Fifteen minutes was allowed, but speed was a minor factor. A large majority of children who could read at third-grade level finished the whole test in the allotted time.

The test was always administered by me personally in the children's regular classroom, and every effort was made to make the administra-

tion uniform. All directions were given orally. The children needed nothing but the test paper and a pencil with an eraser. After the test began, I moved about the room to be sure that all children understood what they were to do. In the cases where there was doubt, because a child was doing nothing or marking consistently wrong answers, I asked the child to read individual words from the test. In almost all of these instances, the child could read so few words that he was, in effect, a non-reader. In a very few cases, the child had not understood the directions correctly, and they were re-explained until he understood. All present third-graders in each school were tested except those who did not speak English.

The tests were scored to penalize guessing. There were 32 items. Correct items were scored 4. Incorrect items were scored minus 1. Items not done were scored 0. (The full range of possible scores was 128 to minus 32.) A child whose score might very well be due to guessing was rated "non-reader." Technically, the cut-off on the high side was approximately the chance median. The raw score equivalents in terms of national norms were as follows:

110 to 128 — grade four and up
84 to 109 — grade three
40 to 83 — grade two
10 to 39 — grade one
–32 to 9 — non-reader

During the survey and the development of the test, it was given to a total of 2,192 third-grade children in 22 different schools in eight different cities. In addition, it was given to 86 second-grade children and to 31 poor readers in fifth grade.

Appendix 2

BEGINNING READING ACHIEVEMENT AND INCOME

As outlined on pages 11-12, beginning reading achievement at the third-grade level in the four successful inner-city schools is approximately that of typical average-income schools. Such achievement, while strikingly higher than that of most inner-city schools, is still markedly lower than that of typical high-income schools, which is an indication of the importance of non-school factors in beginning reading.

These non-school factors (factors over which the school has little or no control) were not specifically studied in this project, but some of them can be guessed at, in my opinion, with considerable accuracy. They include intelligence, motivation, learning at home, and opportunity to practice at home. Naturally, these non-school factors do not always favor individual high-income children over individual inner-city children, but it seems certain that they favor the former group *as a group* over the latter group.

Higher average intelligence does not, in my opinion, have anything to do with race or ethnic group. If one studied all-white schools by income group, one would find differences in average intelligence. While children of average intelligence and even moderately low intelligence can learn to read well, children of high intelligence usually learn reading faster. Since I compared achievement at a point in time (third grade), the more intelligent children as a group will excel. This is particularly true because most schools do not teach beginning reading well. As a result, children in such schools must learn reading on their own to a large extent by inferring the phonics principles that are not taught or poorly taught. This circumstance puts an additional premium on greater intelligence.

Secondly, the high-income children probably have greater motivation to read. Even very poor first-grade children almost always have sufficient motivation to learn to read, in my experience. But motivation is a relative matter, and well-to-do children more often come from homes in which they see parents and older brothers and sisters reading daily. They are more likely to learn that reading can be useful and enjoyable.

Thirdly, high-income children, as a group, learn more about reading and reading-related skills at home. Parents and others in the home are, as a rule, more able to teach reading to preschool and primary-grade children and normally have more time to do so. Moreover, they are less likely to feel that they can't teach something as simple as beginning reading and are less likely to be convinced by the school that it should be left entirely to the institution. Even if high-income families do not teach reading as such, they generally give their small children greater reading-related skills (vocabulary, grammar, diction, enunciation, general knowledge, and so forth).

Finally, in most high-income homes, young children have more opportunity to practice reading in the home. More reading materials are available and often physical conditions are more conducive to reading.

In conclusion, non-school factors are important in beginning reading (and, of course, in other school subjects as well). If all schools were equally effective in teaching beginning reading, these non-school factors would determine achievement. But all schools are *not* equally effective, as this and many other studies show. Accordingly, school differences as well as non-school differences have a bearing on achievement.

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