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The Role of Education in the Prevention of  
Juvenile Delinquency

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READING ROOM

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The problem of juvenile delinquency is a troubling one because it represents children's lives unfulfilled, potentials wasted. Many are working to rehabilitate young people who have broken the law, but almost everyone agrees that the greatest value to our society would be in the development of effective plans for preventing delinquency before it develops. Education alone cannot solve the problems of the delinquent-prone child, but any long-range solution must utilize our educational system as one of the prime vehicles for developing a child towards a meaningful role in our society.

Education is only one part of any child's environment; for the delinquency-prone youngster the family, the police, the courts, religious institutions, and recreation programs must all be marshalled to help with his special needs. Any program truly committed to combatting juvenile delinquency must involve the total environment. However, as Amos has pointed out, "in our culture the school has a unique opportunity to influence behavior and to mold the character of youngsters in its charge."<sup>1</sup> The school is in a central position to attack the causes of juvenile delinquency because of its universality and its actual and potential resources.

Which children must be reached by programs to prevent delinquency? What are their unique needs? According to Maccoby

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<sup>1</sup> William Amos, "Prevention through the School," Delinquency Prevention, by William E. Amos and Charles F. Wellford, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967, p. 129.

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Johnson, and Church, "It is well-known, of course, that delinquency rates are highest in neighborhoods where the residents have low socio-economic status."<sup>2</sup> The children most prone to temptation to juvenile delinquency, therefore, can be generally identified as having the characteristics of the severely disadvantaged child. According to Passow this child lives in depressed areas and is severely handicapped in his schooling by a complexity of conditions in the home, in the neighborhood, and in the classroom.<sup>3</sup> These youngsters lack a wide range of experiences. Deutsch found, for example, that 65% of Negro children had never been more than 25 blocks from home, that half reported no pen or pencil at home, and that the majority of homes had no books.<sup>4</sup> A publication of the new Mark Twain School in Rockville, Maryland describes the experience and psychology of this type of young person:

The home sometimes will have failed to provide the stable climate necessary to nurture emotional growth, will often lack order and organization. School experiences may have been damaging. They are far behind national norms in reading and verbal ability. They may have a failing record in school. Group tests will characteristically show them to be of low average ability. They may have a history of problems in learning to read, difficulty in paying attention, poor handwriting, and organization of tasks. For most of these children long-range goals are meaningless.<sup>5</sup>

They lack "future" orientation because the home often fails to create expectation of future rewards for present activities.

Many of these youngsters have so much trouble communicating with

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<sup>2</sup> Eleanor E. Maccoby, et. al, "Community Integration and the Social Control of Juvenile Delinquency," Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 14, n. 2, (1958) pp. 38-51.

<sup>3</sup> A. Harry Passow, "Education in Depressed Areas," in Education of the Disadvantaged, A. Harry Passow, ed., 1967, p. 336.

<sup>4</sup> Martin P. Deutsch, "Minority Group and Class Status as Related to

adults that they will either withdraw or be openly hostile. Emotionally many disadvantaged children, according to Gowan and Demos, "maintain a negative and unrealistic image of self. Their frustration usually leads to quick discouragement and early abandonment of tasks."<sup>6</sup> In the words of Amos,

The youth who has been exposed to the socialization process of the lower class develops in many instances a concept of himself as a person who is inadequate, has little chance of success and must fight for every gain. He may be so insecure and anxious that he reacts physically to any threatening situation. He lacks a strong self-concept that would offer insulation against delinquent behavior and provide internal strength by which he could benefit from whatever resources he has.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, the delinquency-prone child's home may reflect cultural patterns different from or incompatible with those of the school, so that parental support of his adjustment to education is non-existent. In short, the severely disadvantaged child's problems are multitudinous and deep, and severely cripple his chances to achieve a meaningful place for himself in school and society. The school system must become sensitive to his needs and address itself to overcome his problems.

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Social and Personality Factors in Scholastic Achievement," Mono-graph No. 2 (Ithica, New York, 1960), p. 49.

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"The Mark Twain School and Related Programs," publication of Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Md. (1971), p. 9.

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Amos, op. cit., p. 134.

Educational research has found ways to help the delinquency-prone youngster. The schools must focus squarely on the critical problems of these children in at least three ways:

1. Readjusting attitudes and techniques with the purpose of improving the self-concept of the child.
2. Developing curricula which meet these students' special needs.
3. Providing compensatory education programs at all levels to overcome these children's deficiencies and problems.

Applied together with the concern such a coordinated effort should arouse these programs should do much to combat the development of the psychology of the pre-delinquent.

#### Improving the Self-Concept

Many people feel that a central thrust of education for delinquency-prone children should be focused on revising their self-concepts. Certainly many researchers have linked confidence and security feelings with positive achievement in school. Curriculum, teacher strategy, philosophy and composition, counseling practice, and virtually all of the experiences and educational happenings within a school should begin to make these children's self-image a major concern.

The self-concept, according to Henry Stock Sullivan, develops from the "reflected appraisals of significant others."<sup>7</sup> How a child sees himself is an outgrowth of how other people see him,

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Stock Sullivan, as quoted by Miriam L. Goldberg in "Methods and Materials for Educationally Disadvantaged Youth," in Education for the Disadvantaged, op. cit., p. 386.

especially those people about whom he cares and who have meaning in his life. Miriam Goldberg finds that "among disadvantaged children, especially Negroes, there is a greater degree of self-derogation, of seeing oneself as ugly, stupid, or inferior."<sup>8</sup>

William Kvaraceus, in a table characterizing the personal traits of delinquents and non-delinquents listed "low self-perception, as nothing or less than nothing," as one of the elements of the delinquent-prone personality.<sup>9</sup> When teaching children in a known high-delinquency-rate area, therefore, it becomes imperative for the school to consciously tackle this problem through planned teaching strategies. There are several ways this can be combatted:

1. Evidence has been found to show that a feeling of acceptance and approval by his teacher raises a child's estimate of himself.<sup>10</sup> Teachers must be taught the importance of their roles in creating a new self-concept for children who need it. Middle-class teachers need to be sensitized to this type of child. All teachers need to be shown special procedures such as the postponement of formal reading instruction when necessary, the use of "acting out" procedures and other special techniques, and to be made fully aware of the controlled use of positive reinforcement to increase children's self-confidence.

2. Individualized instruction can psychologically aid the child who comes from an environment engendering poor self-concept. In individualized programs the child will be accorded one-to-one attention and perhaps for the first time will feel the sense of

<sup>8</sup> Miriam Goldberg, *ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>9</sup> William C. Kvaraceus, "The Counselor's Role in Combatting Juvenile Delinquency," Personnel and Guidance Journal, XXXVI (Oct 1957), p. 101.

worth this should foster. Also he will be spared the invidious comparison with better achievers because he will be progressing at his own pace. The opportunities to work at his own speed and to choose his own activities will give him the self-confidence that is a prerequisite to learning.

3. For older students role-playing of job-seeking situations, of fright situations, of response to insult and other such personal areas can be used to help the child ventilate his own frustrations, doubts, and worries and to explore the meaning and appropriateness of his feelings about himself.

4. In neighborhood center programs intensive group work accompanied by broadened social contacts and revised occupational frames of reference have resulted in "significant improvement in self-esteem, level of aspiration, and general behavior."<sup>11</sup>

The feeling that he is succeeding in school can greatly effect a youngster's self-image. If carefully planned the school program can do much to transform the child's negative attitude towards himself into a potent force so that he may develop confidence and personal strength.

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Miriam L. Goldberg, "Factors Affecting Educational Attainment in Depressed Areas," in Education in Depressed Areas, A. Harry Passow, ed., (1964), p. 49.

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John W. Cox and Clarence E. Barnes, "A Report on an experimental research project designed to test the effectiveness of an intensive group work in changing values of Negro boys from fatherless families." Project 017 (C1), Division of Program Research, Social Security Administration (Cleveland: Goodrich-Bell Neighborhood Center) August, 1965.



Developing a Relevant Curriculum

The second focus of education's role in combatting juvenile delinquency is in the area of relevant curricula. Several studies have shown that two frequent reasons students cite for leaving school are lack of interest and inappropriate curriculum.<sup>12</sup> A curriculum that is uninteresting and alien to the possible pre-delinquent will cause him to be frustrated early and to quickly abandon efforts to succeed in school.

The educational program for these children must be planned to deliberately provoke their interest and hold their attention; it must force them by its nature to become actively involved. It must seek to enlarge their range of experiences and frames of reference and at the same time evoke experiences familiar enough to have meaning for them. Passow outlines an instructional content that is compensatory in nature, aimed at overcoming experiential and cognitive deficits. According to him, patterning strategies and adapting materials should aim directly at teaching skills and behaviors to children whose experiences have not previously stimulated such growth. Educators must look anew at content in the specific skill and subject area to determine how to shape content for the disadvantaged child. Real problem-solving and decision-making, especially at the secondary level, are valuable because it is at this level that the disadvantaged youth sees himself apart from the mainstream of society, alien, hostile, and apathetic. Passow proposes a re-examination of vocational

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<sup>12</sup> United States Senate, Interim Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee of the Judiciary, Youth Employment and Juvenile Delinquency (Washington, D.C.; U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955), p. 17.

education and its orientation programs, including extensive use of voluntary services and subsidized work experiences. The essential problem as he sees it, is "how to educate the inner-city child out of his subculture into society's mainstream while preserving and developing personal elements of individuality and divergency, as well as the positive elements of his culture." 13

Specific elements of curricula restructured for delinquent-prone, severely disadvantaged youngsters are:

1. The development of learning experiences in all curriculum areas that relate directly to the lives of the learners
2. Remedial programs to make up the language deficit
3. Creative and discovery and problem-solving activities
4. A wide range of instructional materials, designed to hold students' interest
5. Field trips to expose children to experiences that are not part of their everyday lives.
6. Much opportunity for verbal and written self-expression.
7. Individualized instruction programs
8. Open classrooms
9. Non-graded classes
10. Significant opportunities for self-selected activities. This forces the student to take an interest in his program and gives him confidence in himself.
11. Intensive remedial tutoring when needed.

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A. Harry Passow, "Instructional Content for Depressed Urban Centers: Problems and Approaches," Education of the Disadvantaged, op. cit., pp. 352-69.

18. Involvement of the community when developing and evaluating the curriculum.

### Compensatory Education Programs

Beyond the institution of a curriculum which is meaningful to students the school must institute special programs to meet and overcome students' special problems, compensatory programs to provide extra help in conquering a complex of social, economic, and educational handicaps suffered by the disadvantaged children. Compensatory education programs aim to procure a successful school life for children and have dropout prevention as their goal.<sup>14</sup> The programs range from pre-school through high school and even colleges and universities. They include:

1. Enrichment programs
2. Vocational or career education programs
3. School dropout programs
4. Programs of Guidance and Counseling, which include delinquent-proneness screening and early identification of dropouts

No matter how especially-gearred for him the regular classroom program may be, the delinquent-prone child's needs demand special helps.

Enrichment programs were designed to give children a wide range of experiences and to concentrate on language development skills like speaking, listening and writing. "Project Head Start" is a federal program designed to prepare three and four-year-olds for Kindergarten and first grade. Head Start is the most massive of the federal enrichment programs to date; however, there are others. Follow Through is a continuing program for culturally

and economically deprived children in grades K-3 who were in Head Start and have academic needs. Operation Moving Ahead is also for grades K-3 but is for all children having academic difficulties even if not disadvantaged. For older children a widely-known project which originated in New York is The Higher Horizons Program. This enrichment program is aimed at junior high school students.<sup>15</sup>

Vocational education or career education programs are being expanded rapidly and must continue to increase in the near future. Currently 12% of the country's high school students are in vocational education programs.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Sidney Marland, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, has stated his strong conviction that the many students who are now enrolled in the general curriculum (almost 50%) are not being prepared for any job. His goal is to change educational attitudes so that at least 50% of young people will soon choose career education.

For the potential delinquent career education may be the saving deterrent from leaving. Some students drop out for economic reasons; the establishment of work-study programs in secondary schools, and even in some junior high schools, offering pay as an incentive, can keep some of them in school.

In the Sacramento City Unified School District an experimental program for truant and seriously misbehaving students was established. Called the "Opportunity School" it

<sup>15</sup>

Passow, "Education in Depressed Areas," op. cit., p. 334.

<sup>16</sup>

Sidney Marland, Jr., in an interview in The New York Times, (August 8, 1971), p. 58.

was geared for junior high school students. The school aimed to change attitudes, to stress the qualities of respect for authority, courtesy, cooperation, drive, ambition, hard work, punctuality, neatness, and self-respect. Several innovative features included individually-tailored programs, use of para-professionals, flexible scheduling, low student-teacher ratio and homework only if the family desired it.

*It's the program working*

Clearly one of the main jobs of educating youths must be to prepare them for meaningful employment upon graduation. Vocational and career education can help to prevent juvenile delinquency by offering students a clearer alternative.

School drop-out programs were given a tremendous boost in the summer of 1965 by President John Kennedy under the direction of the U.S. Office of Education. Because of soaring unemployment rates for dropouts summer contact campaigns were initiated as emergency measures to reach youths who had no incentive to graduate. The emphasis given drop-out programs has produced several positive effects. The programs succeeded in focusing the attention of the public and the local communities involved on the scope of the dropout problem and on the conditions which cause dropping out. Also schools were forced to recognize their own past failures to offer programs flexible enough and relevant enough. This realization has in some places resulted in

such changes as student employment in the school itself, in adjustment of the time schedule to allow for employment or other outside activity, and in returning young mothers and unemployed dropouts to active school affiliation.

Potential delinquents are often those unemployed youths who dropped out and are too old to enroll in full-time school but who could be helped by vocational training. The Office of Man Power Automation and Training of the U.S. Department of Labor through the Office of Economic Opportunity has created programs for basic job skills for previously unemployables. These projects, which work in most large cities, are aimed at the youths for whom any return to school is out of the question. The program typically includes counseling and vocational training with academic subjects like mathematics and science added only as they are needed for a specific job.

Good counseling and guidance programs can play a strategic role in preventing juvenile delinquency. Effective programs often detect the delinquent-prone child early and give him special support. Also counselors have a central role in vocational guidance of youths in drop-out and work-study programs.

Very few school districts have programs to detect delinquent-proneness. Yet William Kvaraceus has stated that: "prevention cannot be achieved without systematic and scientific efforts to identify at an early age those children whose deviations

in personal make-up, home, and neighborhood situations promise future hazards in personal adjustment." <sup>17</sup> Kvaraceus also noted that a number of prediction tools and devices have been prepared for early identification. <sup>18</sup> These devices include:

The Porteus Maze Test (Porteus, 1942)

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Hathaway and Monachesi, 1953)

Behavior Cards: A Test for Delinquent Children (Stogdill, 1949)

The Glueck Prediction Tables (Glueck, 1950)

K. P. Proneness Scales and Check List (Kvaraceus)

These instruments are not foolproof but they have been shown to have sufficient validation data to recommend their use by trained professional workers to identify children needing special attention early when help can be most effective. <sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> William Kvaraceus, "The Counselor's Role in Combatting Juvenile Delinquency," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 36 (Oct., 1957) p. 100.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 103-104.

<sup>19</sup> Kvaraceus, op. cit., p. 104.



### Conclusions

Too often the cycle shows that early failure in school leads to alienation from school to dropping out of school, to juvenile delinquency, to adult unemployment. The school must take a central role in breaking the cycle.

1. The programs which are available for delinquency-prone youth are generally good and some are excellent.
2. These programs, however, handle only a fraction of the children needing specialized attention.
3. Because of a variety of factors the predelinquent often feels inadequate and insecure, and schools must address themselves to this problem of poor self-concept.
4. The curriculum needs of this population are almost never met in the classroom of today's public school.
5. All levels of compensatory education can help the delinquent-susceptible youth; they should be continued and expanded.
6. Counseling efforts should be intensified so that the ridiculous ratios of 400 to one or worse can be reduced to reasonable counselor/student ratios (100/1 or 50/1).

### Recommendations

1. The federal government should increase the number and scope of existing programs for the disadvantaged and create many new ones to deal directly with predelinquent specific problems.

3. Montgomery County and Prince George's County must create and expand programs dealing with elementary level children with poor backgrounds to help the 160,000 plus children who were not fortunate enough to be in the two counties' combined total of 720 in the Head Start Program. (See Survey to follow) This tokenism, especially in Prince George's County, (210 children) is an insult to the needy families and especially children who fall within the federal guidelines of poverty-level.
3. Committees should be created to study and revise the curriculum in public schools, especially secondary schools, to meet the needs of students.
4. Many more counselors in both elementary and secondary schools with emphasis on Title I schools.
5. Teachers should be given in-service training in techniques of helping the disadvantaged child.
6. Early detection programs should be established to find delinquency-susceptible children.

I firmly believe that education can play a large role in the prevention of juvenile delinquency. Research has been done and has shown ways to help children from impoverished environments, children deprived of the apparatus for successful adjustment, to overcome their deficits and change their frames of reference.

What is needed now is a commitment on the part of education leaders and the community to use the resources we have to insure the fullest development of every child.

As a postscript to my work on this paper I contacted the two local counties, Prince George's and Montgomery Counties, to discover the extent of their programs which might help in the prevention of juvenile delinquency. This is what I found:

	Prince George's	Montgomery
1. Student Population (total)	162, 828	126,207
Black student pop.	36,405 (22.1%)	7,292 (5.8%)
2. Elementary students	95,454	66,753
Black elem. students	22,701	4,440
3. Secondary students	67,374	59,454
Black sec. students	13,704	2,922
4. Is there a director or head of compensatory education?	No	No
5. Is there a director of federal programs?	Yes	Yes
6. Head Start Program	Yes	Yes
Enrollment	210 children	510 children

	Prince George's	Montgomery
7. Follow Through	296 children (K-3)	No program: the county is not eligible
8. Operation Moving Ahead	4,000 children	No program: the county is not eligibe
9. Work-study programs	Yes	Yes
10. Special Schools for children with learning problems	None	The Mark Twain School*
11. Early detection program	No	No
12. Intensive tutoring ser- vices for under-achievers	No	Yes**
13. Per pupil expenditure	\$982.00	\$1,200.00

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\* The Mark Twain School, due to open January 27, 1972, will work with 250 students of average intelligence, ages 11-19 (grades 6-12) who have learning difficulties or who are not achieving in the regular classroom situation. The facilities and staff are outstanding. The per-pupil expenditure will be five times higher than for the other children in the county (\$6,000.00 per pupil).

\*\* Intensive tutoring in the county is done not by the school system, but by a voluntary organization in Kensington called "Ken-Gar".

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My informal survey led me to some observations about the local school systems:

1. Prince George's County has a great need of pupil services.
2. Montgomery has fewer blacks, but a higher per-pupil expenditure.
3. Prince George's has almost four times as many blacks and a lower per-pupil expenditure.
4. Neither county has a significant number of students in Head Start:
  - a. Montgomery County, with 126,807 students, has less than 1/2 of 1% in Head Start.
  - b. Prince George's County, with 162,828 students, has less than 1/8 of 1% in Head Start.
5. Montgomery County, with fewer poor people, has twice as many children in Head Start.
6. There is no coordination of services available for students who are having learning difficulties and may be potential delinquents. Calls to the administrative offices and conversations with Guidance, Human Relations, Pupil Personnel, Special Education, and Vocational Education Departments apparently revealed that they function in complete and compacent oblivion of each other.
7. The Mark Twain School should be an important and vital addition to the county. The pilot study done for its creation, however, identified 3000 Montgomery County students as in need of its services. It will take \$50. Thirteen more Mark Twains could be built to accomodate the need. Prince George's County has no

school like this.

8. No program for early detection of delinquency-prone children exists in either county.

A brief look at these two counties only points out how much there is to be done in marshalling resources to help the disadvantaged child. Until a broad commitment is made the schools cannot utilize their uniquely central position to take a major role in seeking to prevent juvenile delinquency. The troubles of the youngster headed for delinquency are deeply-founded and must be overcome through efforts in all parts of his environment, but the schools, as the most organized and most universal institution the child will encounter, must take the lead.

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Personal and telephone interviews were conducted with many administrative officials in both Prince George's and Montgomery Counties. The directors of pupil personnel services, records departments, counseling divisions, federal programs divisions, and heads of the Head Start and Follow Through programs were consulted. Most helpful were Mr. George McKinney of Prince George's County, Director of the Office of Federal Programs, and Mrs. Helen Kohut of Montgomery County, Coordinator of Federal Programs for the county.

**END**

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