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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a framework for the analysis and evaluation of intervention on children's behalf against which to analyze actions upon their environment. The first section looks at the complex issue of defining suitable child development outcomes for intervention programs, noting that because the concept of childhood varies across cultures and classes, definitions of developmental outcomes need to take into account cultural and class variables. The second section examines two examples of environmental conditions that threaten children's development, poverty and prejudice, and explains how both situations involve complex systems of adverse circumstances that tend to be chronic and that interact in a multiplicative fashion with respect to negative effects on children's development. The third section summarizes briefly the characteristics of a general model for planning and analyzing the results of interventions on children's behalf, recommending that interventions be: (1) child-entered; (2) culturally sensitive; (3) multi-faceted to combat multiple afflictions; (4) support families, improve health care and schools, and enhance neighborhood conditions; and (5) demolish societal barriers to child development, such as ethnic prejudice. An afterword examines the implications of the findings for future program development. Contains 87 references. (MDM)

# THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CHILD

Terezinha Nunes

Bernard van Leer Foundation

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# INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce Terezinha Nunes' paper on the *Environment of the Child*. The paper is an outcome of a process of analysis - supported by the Foundation - on the environmental variables which mediate the effects of poverty and discrimination on disadvantaged young children. Particular attention was paid to the ways in which care givers' beliefs, feelings and behaviour affect the development of children.

The analysis of *the Environment of the Child* has been carried out through various activities implemented during 1993. Foundation staff seminars have taken place; Foundation supported project leaders have been consulted; researchers with international reputations have been asked for comments; workshops in New Delhi and Mexico City have been organised to which specialists from Asia and Latin America with both research knowledge and practical experience, were invited to participate.

Throughout the discussions, the Foundation set in motion a dialogue between theory and practice. This will continue by examining the framework presented in this paper vis-á-vis intervention programmes. Studies of large scale programmes will be carried out in France, India, Kenya and Venezuela to understand the ways in which programmes operating in different cultural settings, seek to improve the environment of the young child. In particular, the studies will identify, describe and explain the ways in which these programmes are affecting care giver's beliefs, feelings and behaviour.

# THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CHILD

Terezinha Nunes

## Preface

This paper was prepared for the Bernard van Leer Foundation; it was originally intended as a working document to provide a theoretical background against which to analyse actions upon children's environments which aim at fostering their development. The preliminary version was discussed in two independent workshops, in New Delhi and in Mexico City, where experts and practitioners raised questions and made significant contributions to the analysis of children's socio-cultural environment. The workshops were coordinated by Dr. Horacio Walker, of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, whose aptitude in this role made the workshops a successful learning experience for all concerned. I am grateful to him and all the participants in these workshops for their comments on the first draft: the final version of this paper owes much to their contributions. The opinions expressed, however, remain my own responsibility.

## Introduction

Many children grow up in environments that are viewed as threatening to their well-being. These threats may, for example, originate from war, poverty, prejudice, abandonment, or abuse. Although there may be uncertainties about the type of damage which such environments will cause to children's development, about the mechanisms by which these negative influences on development operate, and about how permanently children will be harmed by such adverse circumstances, there is little doubt that, given the power, we would choose to protect our children from these threats. Unfortunately, however, these environmental conditions are not easily changed and many children around the world grow up in adverse circumstances of some kind. War, poverty, and prejudice, for example, are products of society that humankind has not yet learned to control. How can one best help children who are born into these threatening environments? How can one choose the best course of action and evaluate the impact of such interventions?

The aim of this paper is to offer a framework for the analysis and evaluation of actions taken on behalf of children upon their environment. The first section of the paper looks at the complex issue of defining suitable child development outcomes for intervention programmes. The concept of childhood is seen to vary across classes and cultures resulting in different expectations and demands for children's development. Consistent with these demands, children's developmental trajectories also differ, thereby creating gaps between children when cross-group comparisons are carried out. Thus the definition of child development outcomes required from intervention programmes needs to consider carefully the existing strengths and weaknesses of the group which is expected to benefit from the programme.

The second section selects for closer scrutiny two examples of environmental conditions that threaten children's development: poverty and prejudice. Growing up with poverty and prejudice, although characterised as unfavourable circumstances, might not in isolation threaten children's development. However, both situations involve complex systems of adverse circumstances which tend to be chronic and which interact in a multiplicative fashion with respect to negative effects on children's development. Several aspects of each of these undesirable environments are discussed.

The third and final section summarises briefly the characteristics of a general model for planning and analysing the results of interventions on children's behalf.

The paper concentrates on *social and educational* aspects of children's development rather than physical growth and maturation. Similarly, in looking at environmental factors, the emphasis is on socio-cultural aspects rather than biological inputs such as levels of nutrition or diseases. This choice of focus does not signify a disregard for the role of biological factors in development but rather reflects two of my personal biases. The first is that I believe all children should receive adequate nutrition and health care independently of whether these factors affect psychological development: there is thus no need to validate nutritional and health care intervention on the basis of their effects on psychological development. Nutrition and health care are goals for intervention in and of themselves.

My second bias is a strong belief that the environmental circumstances which will be the central focus of this paper - poverty and prejudice - are unrelated to biological causes and are products of society. Much important work has already been carried out to show that we do not live in meritocracies, where the poor would be poor as the result of an inherent lack of competence, and that prejudice is not the result of superiority of one group over the other but a social, historical, cultural, and political issue. This literature cannot be surveyed here but many reviews are available (see, for example, Carraher, 1989; Ceci, 1989; Ginsburg, 1972; Reeves and Chevannes, 1988).

CHAPTER ONE

## Understanding the impact of the environment on children's lives: the search for a model

In order to identify positive developmental outcomes which can constitute important aims for intervention, it is first necessary to consider the relationship between children's socio-cultural environment and development. If intervention programmes on behalf of children are to be developed, what should they be trying to accomplish? The answer to this question may appear quite simple but further investigation will show that this is a deceptive simplicity.

### *The relationship between childhood and society*

Although it is possible to use biological criteria to classify humans as adults or children, 'childhood' - that is, the concept of what is a child - is a cultural invention. The idea of 'childhood' is loaded with notions of cans and cannots, shoulds and should-nots. What children are expected to know or do, what they should receive and give, how they should behave, and what they need are all defined by a society. Variations in the definition of childhood can be observed both across time and across cultures. Kessen (1979) and Woodhead (1991) have analysed differences in cultural definitions of childhood across time in the United States and in Britain, emphasising the cultural and historical nature of the concept of childhood. Whiting and Whiting (1975), pursuing the comparison of differences across cultures, looked at children's engagement in household activities in six cultures and found that the tasks expected of children at a certain age varied significantly across cultures.

Even within a society, childhood concepts are not uniform: variations can be seen across social classes and gender. Ochoa and Santibanez (1985) describe the existence of different sociological realities of childhood in Chile, with clearly diverging characteristics (such as differing levels of infant mortality and nutrition, differential access to schooling, and markedly different immediate environments) which require of the children distinct coping strategies and the attainment of diverse goals.

> Whereas children from the middle class have an easy access to school and are only integrated into the world of work after they have completed or almost completed schooling, children from the marginalized sectors find access to school difficult and generally cannot complete the whole school cycle as a consequence of their need to work at early ages. The value attributed to autonomy or independency similarly differs (within society) according to gender. Further variation is observed in the value attributed to intelligence by teachers in rural and urban environments. All of these variations stress the existence of different conceptions of childhood and also of distinct opportunities for children (within the same society). (Ochoa and Santibanez, 1985: p. 10, my translation)

Anandalaksmy (1993) and Khullar (1993) point to the existence of different realities for boys and girls in India and stress that 'childhood' in many

societies must be seen as a superordinate concept, removed from the more significant realities of boyhood and girlhood. The rights and duties of boys and girls, what they are expected and allowed to do, learn, and accomplish, vary so widely that the most appropriate level of analysis in India would be gender specific. These studies illustrate the cultural nature of the idea of childhood and the need to think of children as living in particular societies in a particular time (White, 1993).

Just as children are seen to have different needs and rights in the course of time and across cultures, so they are also assigned - and come to play - different roles in society. In a general way, children in agrarian communities and impoverished urban areas are expected to contribute early to domestic food and craft production and not to spend much time in formal education settings (LeVine, 1988) - and generally this is what happens. In contrast, children from more affluent sectors of the urban environment in Western societies are expected to engage in many years of formal education and be incapable of contributing to economic production for a long period of time - and this is how they grow up and behave. Even in matters where maturation might be expected to play a more extensive role, differences across societies in the expectations for children are reflected in children's development. In Britain, for example, children are expected to learn to read at the age of five; they are taught, and they spend much of their time practising reading at this age. In other countries (like Sweden and Brazil) the appropriate age for learning to read is seven; in these countries, five year olds cannot, as a rule, read. This difference, although culturally determined, is not without serious consequences for many children. In Britain a six year old can be labelled a 'backward reader' and be assigned to remedial classes whereas in Brazil or Sweden there is no room for such labelling at the age of six.

These differences in children's behaviour illustrate the concept of reactivity in child development: societies set up environments for the development of particular behaviour patterns in children and, by and large, they grow up in the expected ways. If by any chance they do not, they become classified as 'deviants'.

Taken together, these two assumptions of the cultural nature of childhood and the concept of reactivity, would suggest a harmonious picture of child development: as the child is capable, society expects; as society expects, the child is/becomes capable. Such an adaptive model of parental care was in fact proposed by LeVine (1984; 1988). According to his model, developed in the context of a comparison between parental care in agrarian and rural societies, parents respond to environmental risks and demands by developing particular goals and strategies in parental care.

> The optimal parental strategy for agrarian societies, according to this model, is quantitative; it emphasizes high fertility as its primary goal. This reflects the high value of relatively unskilled child labour in domestic food and craft production, the high value of numerous progeny for long-term social support during a parent's later years, the low cost of each child to parents in terms of domestic resources, and the high mortality rate of infants and children ... The optimal strategy for urban-industrial societies is qualitative; its goals concern the child's acquisition of skills rather than the number of children born. This strategy reflects the fact that children cost more and

> contribute less in an urban-industrial setting than in an agrarian one; it also reflects low infant and child mortality rates, as well as the pressures of a competitive labour market that operates through an academically graded occupational hierarchy to reward extended (and expensive) preparation for adult roles... The task of raising a child is redefined as a voluntary activity demanding much more parental time, energy, and attention over a longer period of time. (LeVine, 1988: pp. 6-7)

However, the adaptiveness of these ('optimal') parental strategies from the socio-biological point of view must be questioned in the light of the human dramas that take place in the lives of particular individuals. High fertility and high child-mortality bring suffering to children and parents alike. Although together they may be effective in guaranteeing the survival of agrarian communities, from the viewpoint of those suffering, this is a violent model. In a similar way, although the task of raising a child in the urban environment is seen by society as a voluntary activity, the demands of 'parental time, energy and attention' over an extended period may surpass the resources of impoverished sectors of the urban population, bringing stress and conflict into the lives of children. The model of voluntary parenthood serves the purpose of placing responsibility for child care exclusively on the parents - and often basically on the mother. Although those who have children are assuring the survival of societies (Melhuish and Moss, 1990), different societies accept varying levels of responsibility towards this process which guarantees their maintenance.

Thus although there is a general correspondence between a society's conception of childhood and children's developmental trajectories in that society, this fit is not necessarily optimal or adaptive from the viewpoint of many children and parents. I wish to suggest that a theory for intervention must look at how views of childhood influence child development, and how parental strategies and the family environment reflect the conditions of society. But I would further suggest that a theory for intervention must go beyond the analysis of factors that determine children's developmental trajectories, and must consider also how children and parents experience their own lives. This choice of models does not amount to restoring the subjective experience of parents and children as a causal factor of children's developmental trajectories. It simply recognises that intervention models need to aim simultaneously at improving living conditions at the community level and reducing personal suffering. Although psychological factors may not be significant determinants of sociological processes, they are extremely important in the evaluation of actions that aim at improving children's welfare.

*What are positive developmental outcomes?*

Interventions on behalf of children must have clear goals. But one must ask: whose goals? The discussion above stressed that parents' goals for their children vary across and within culture, with living environment (for example, rural or urban), with children's gender, and with parental socio-economic condition.

Ochoa and Santibanez (1985) stress that with these variations belongs an ideology. When institutions conceive of 'children', they do not take diversity into account. The established concept of childhood in any society is reductionist and attributes universality to characteristics that are

particular. For example, 'the Chilean child', represents an established concept that does not correspond to the reality in a large proportion of the Chilean population. To adopt the characteristics of 'the Chilean child' as the desired outcome for intervention programmes would correspond to sanctioning 'discriminatory instruments that do not take into account the typical diversity of social reality' (Ochoa and Santibanez, 1985: p. 10, my translation).

The concept of 'development' is not devoid of evaluative connotations. Development is commonly used to mean improvement, progress, evolution, advancement, all of which contain evaluative perspectives. We cannot overcome the evaluative connotations of development but we must be aware of them. An intervention programme that seeks to transform the children living in threatening environments into what one might call 'textbook children' risks losing sight of the strengths of those children on whose behalf it is acting, because such strengths will not be characteristic of mainstream children in the culture. Two examples can illustrate this point.

> There's another custom for our twelfth birthday ... I remember when I was twelve, my father gave me a little pig. I was also given two little chickens and a lamb. I love sheep very much. These animals are not to be touched or sold without my permission. The idea is for a child to start looking at his own needs... It wasn't long before my little pig grew and had five little piglets. I had to feed them without neglecting the work for my parents. I had to find food for them myself. So what I used to do was, after my work in the fields, I'd come back at six or seven in the evening, do all my jobs in the house for the next morning, and then at about nine o'clock I'd start weaving. Sometimes I'd weave until ten... After about fifteen days, I'd have three or four pieces of cloth to sell, and I'd buy maize or other little things for my pigs to eat. (Menchu, 1983: pp. 50-51)

This description of Rigoberta Menchu's experience as a twelve year old contrasts starkly to that offered in developmental textbooks, an example of which is transcribed below:

> Not counting classroom time, teenagers in the United States spend an average of 22 hours a week with their peers. They report spending more time with their friends than they do with their families or by themselves, and the amount of time they spend this way increases over the course of adolescence (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). It should come as no surprise, then, that teenagers typically say they enjoy the time they spend with their friends more than anything else they do (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). They feel their friends understand them and allow them to be themselves. (Cole and Cole, 1989: pp. 583-84).

The way these teenagers spend their time reflects the expectations of their own society towards them. Their carefree attitude towards life and their own time contrasts strongly with the sense of responsibility of the indigenous Guatemalan girl. It would be just as inappropriate to classify Rigoberta Menchu as 'incompetent' and an 'underachiever' because she did not know how to read at the age of twelve as it would be to classify the American teenagers as 'irresponsible'. They are acting out patterns for adolescence in their culture in the same way that Menchu does in hers. In both cases,

important skills for adult life are being learned. An intervention programme that failed to acknowledge the level of social development of the indegenous Guatemalan girl and concentrated on her inadequacies from the viewpoint of the dominant society would miss the opportunity of using her strengths to further her development. The difficulty for intervention programmes is to find goals that describe positive child development outcomes for the groups in question without either imposing the goals and standards from the dominant culture or blocking routes to goals which may be difficult for a particular group to access. To borrow an expression from Filp (1993), the challenge for intervention programmes is to create for children worlds that open rather than close possibilities and to evaluate their outcomes in a congruous fashion.

The complexity of choosing child development outcomes for intervention programmes indicates the need to re-evaluate general models within particular settings. Developmental psychology research has itself been shaken by the tensions between universal models of development and cultural specificity particularly in the last three decades. Many researchers have turned to analyses of development that take culture into account either in cross-cultural comparisons or in studies of different groups in the same society (for example, Cole and Scribner, 1974; Cole et al., 1971; Edwards, 1982; Heath, 1983; Nunes et al., 1993; Super and Harkness, 1982, to name just a few). There is much to be learned from these analyses for the difficult task of identifying clear child development outcomes for intervention projects. They challenge the unilinearity of cognitive, social, and moral development. Heath (1983), for example, points out that learning from reading is assumed in US schools to follow a certain path: at first, children can only understand the simple facts in a text and only later are they able to make analogies and more abstract connections. However, Hart shows that in an Afro-American community which she studied, children learned from stories by making analogies at very early ages, while little emphasis was placed on details of facts. The mismatch between schools' expected developmental trajectories and children's experiences led teachers to ignore the linguistic strengths of these children and focus instead on aspects that meant little to them, thereby bringing the spectre of failure into the children's lives. In the field of mathematics, Nunes et al. (1993) observed that the sophisticated oral calculation procedures employed by working class children were disregarded in school, where they failed to solve through written algorithms problems they could have solved effectively through their own methods. Edwards (1982), looking at moral development, has emphasised the inadequacy of Western models, such as that of Colby et al. (1983), in the analysis of moral development among communities that do not base their practices on written codes of law. Once a system of judgement by elders is replaced by a written legal code to be applied by jurors unfamiliar with the personal history of the accused, the sense and the letter of the law can become divorced. The result of this separation between what is ultimately fair and what is written in the law is the emergence in Western countries of a post-conventional type of morality, where the letter of the law is questioned - a way of thinking that may not exist in societies where moral judgements are processed in a more interactive fashion.

These examples illustrate how success in one system may engender failure in another, where different criteria for good child development outcomes are applied. The textbook child that attends school until mid-adolescence, chooses a profession, receives adequate training, finds a job, and only later becomes an adult with a family and all the corresponding

responsibilities, is much too far removed from the reality of the majority of children for whom intervention programmes are designed. In their difficult environments, they will have learned and achieved much that mainstream children have not, but will fall short of achievements by other criteria. If we fail to recognise their positive attributes, we are bound to design intervention programmes that do not capitalise on these strengths (Schmelkes, 1993). However, recognising strengths is not the same as romanticising the lives of children who grow up in adverse circumstances: they still have to face mainstream society and will be more likely than other children to lose out in life.

CHAPTER TWO

## Threatening environments and intervention programmes: a general model

Programmes designed to intervene in children's environments can be targeted at groups of children whose lives are adversely affected in a variety of ways. They may be the children of recent immigrants for whom there could be a relatively bright future if the political conditions in the country did not act as barriers to their parents' progress. They may be the children of minority groups (in the social-psychological sense of groups discriminated against in society) or impoverished groups in affluent countries that could take affirmative action on behalf of these children and yet do not. They may also be children growing up in countries which are themselves impoverished and prey to foreign debt, droughts, war, or other types of catastrophe. The children in these diverse groups live in markedly different objective conditions. In some cases basic survival may be the aim of the intervention whilst in others survival is already guaranteed and the actions taken on behalf of the children are aimed at the attainment of other goals. Within the limits of currently available social theories, no single model can accommodate all the factors that merit consideration in the description of these children's environment. The specific factors that must be taken into account will vary with the location of the project, the nature of the threat to the children's well-being, and the specific objectives to be attained. However, it is still possible to discuss a general model that can be used in describing children's environments and to think about factors for consideration in more specific circumstances.

Below, I will present two examples of situations in which children's welfare may be threatened and describe research that has attempted to clarify the processes by which these threats become reality. After describing these situations, I will try to discuss the common perspectives in the approaches illustrated by the specific cases.

### *Growing up in poverty*

Defining poverty may seem to many a rather academic activity. However, poverty means different things in different societies. In a contemporary, urban, cash economy, poverty can be simply defined as a lack of cash to cover the needs of the family. Definitions of this type are used in research in the United States, for example, where studies have indicated that income *per se* is important. Children's health status is directly correlated with income even after maternal education is controlled for (Butler et al., 1984) and family income during childhood and adolescence can be used to predict adult occupational status even when education and occupational status of the parents are controlled for (Duncan, 1991). In the United States, academic and professional success are also predictable from parental income after results in traditional measures of intelligence have been statistically controlled for (Ceci, 1990). From such data, it can be concluded that income matters (Duncan, 1991). However, as Roy (1982) has argued, this is a simplistic position which needs to be qualified on at least three counts.

First, a certain level of income in the United States means something rather different than the same level in developing countries. Poverty level in the United States is defined as the need to spend more than one third of the household income on food (Duncan, 1991). Poverty in impoverished countries means not having enough to provide food for the family; those spending only

one third of their income on food are definitely not poor. Following Roy (1982), one must distinguish between absolute poverty, a situation in which there is not enough for physical survival, and relative poverty, in which the issue is not survival but reaching a level which is, in that society, considered a minimum for decency. Whereas absolute poverty is not rare in developing countries, poverty in developed countries is of the relative type. For relative poverty, 'the essence of poverty is inequality' (Valentine, 1970). With inequality comes degradation for those living below the standards that the community views as acceptable (Galbraith, 1962), and often also an internalisation of this feeling of degradation (Freire, 1970).

Second, even within a society the same level of income may have different meanings. This possibility is supported by a study by Flanagan (1990), who looked at the effects of unemployment on family stress, and observed that the level of income was less important than the position of the family with respect to (un)employment. Even with a constant level of income in the study group, there were still differences across families as a function of loss of income. For those families who had entered a chronic situation of economic loss through long-lasting unemployment - i.e. those for whom this level represented a loss of income - family stress was higher than for those suffering temporary loss or those who had actually increased their income during the same period. It is possible that such differences may also exist between rural and urban groups since urban economies appear to rely much more heavily on cash exchanges than rural economies, at least in certain countries. This hypothesis is supported by a longitudinal study by Rutter and Madge (1976) which analysed the incidence of socio-emotional problems among children in the Isle of Wight and inner city London. They observed that the same social class position appeared to have different significance in the rural and urban environment; socio-economic status was a much stronger predictor of socio-emotional problems for the inner city children than for those from the rural environment.

Finally, low income never comes alone. One does not need to ask, for example, whether poverty has an effect on the level of parental stress resulting from financial difficulties, on the choice of neighbourhood in which children grow up, on the quality of the schools they attend, or the health care they receive. These factors are neither independent from nor consequences of poverty: they are part of poverty. Income level *per se* might not make a difference but it cannot be separated from these other factors. This characteristic of poverty as a system of factors rather than an isolated variable is consequential. In a review of the literature on risk factors and child development outcomes, Rutter (1980) suggests that children who encounter one risk factor are no more likely to suffer serious consequences than children who experience no risk factors at all. However, the interaction between risk factors seems to be multiplicative: two risk factors result in four times the incidence of problems in a group compared to the general population. Eisenberg (1982) also emphasises this interaction between risk factors in an analysis of the effects of poor nutrition on child development: 'In a fashion yet to be understood, appropriate stimulation in the home appears to be able to protect against the deleterious effects of undernutrition on mental development' (Eisenberg, 1982: p. 63). On the other hand, the lack of stimulation associated with poor nutrition will result in definite losses in cognitive development.

Chronic poverty is characterised by a host of factors. It severely restricts options in many domains of children's lives, such as choice of

neighbourhood, schools, educational and recreational activities (McLoyd, 1990). Poverty increases the probability of children being viewed more negatively and receiving less positive attention from teachers (Gouldner, 1978). There is little doubt that growing up in poverty threatens children's well-being and limits their developmental opportunities, and that poverty is associated with an increase in the incidence of both socio-emotional and cognitive problems (Furnham, 1985; Wallace, 1974). But how does the threat become reality? What processes are involved in the inter-generational transmission of poverty and the maintenance of risk factors in the lives of future generations? As Willis (1988/77) points out, it is much too simple to say that children from oppressed groups (such as the working class in England) have no choice in a liberal democratic society where there is no obvious physical coercion and there is a degree of self-direction. Thus, he argues, the question that has to be answered is why oppressed groups remain in the same position despite inferior rewards for their occupations and undesirable social definitions of their behaviour.

Inter-generational transmission of poverty

It is therefore important to analyse the processes involved in producing negative outcomes when children grow up in poverty or economic loss. The value of a model lies in its attempt to lay bare the assumptions that we implicitly make about how particular environmental conditions affect children. A model, one must remember, is always a partial representation of phenomena. However, developing a model can be very useful for intervention programmes because models require an explicit representation of which factors seem crucial in obtaining which effects and which factors may interact with each other. Thus models can be valuable in the identification of the ways in which intervention can be effective. It is important, though, to view current models for the inter-generational transmission of poverty as temporary. There is still much to be learned from theoretical analyses and practical programmes.

*Poverty as insufficient income*. The social experiments carried out in the United States under the War against Poverty announced by Lyndon Johnson treated poverty basically as a matter of family income and behaviour (Huston, 1991a). The policies developed under this programme were mostly directed towards changing parental income through cash or in-kind benefits (such as food-stamps or government sponsored health care) as temporary measures to be used mostly during unemployment. These measures should be later replaced by the ingress of the mother in the labour force. Phillips (1991) suggests that 'the central goal to be served by child care [in these programmes] has been to move families from poverty to economic self-sufficiency and, thereby, to reduce public expenditure on welfare' (p. 159). The welfare model stems from a socio-economic orientation. Policies and measures of programme success developed under this perspective may differ from those appropriate for child-development oriented programmes. According to Huston (1991a), the income maintenance experiments were evaluated by economic criteria, and by these criteria they are considered to have failed (Murray, 1984). They aimed at increasing the participation of adults in the labour force whereas, in some groups, work hours decreased. 'Interpretations of these patterns dwelt almost entirely on the negative implications of reduced work hours for family income and for the health of the economy. They rarely asked whether there were benefits of reduced maternal employment for the family or for the children' (Huston, 1991a: p. 5). A child-centred analysis would investigate whether the income supplementation led to improved nutrition, parent-child relations, school motivation, neighbourhood safety, or physical health, for example. When Murray (1984) concluded that

poverty is intractable and that government programmes cannot solve the problem, this conclusion was not based on evaluations of children's development but on an economic-centred view. Huston (1991b) stresses the limitations of this perspective both in terms of generating policies and evaluating outcomes. When child care is available for those facing economic hardships, for example, it may have more goals than simply an income increase through maternal employment: many factors that make up the system of poverty will be affected. By child-centred criteria, many programmes developed under the War on Poverty were successful. Schorr (1991) has reviewed the literature on successful programmes and lists several health and education initiatives, many of which showed positive results even during a ten-year follow up.

In short, an economic-centred model cannot be considered appropriate for the analysis of environmental interventions on children's behalf. Economic-centred models do not offer hypotheses about the inter-generational transmission of poverty, and they use programme evaluation criteria that differ from those one would choose when the goal of the programme is to promote children's development.

*The culture of poverty*. Lewis (1966) proposed a psychological and cultural explanation for the inter-generational transmission of poverty by suggesting that it was caused by 'the culture of poverty'. Briefly, the poor are placed in such conditions in societies that they develop short-term adaptation strategies which help them deal with their present situation. The effect of adaptations which seem positive in the short-term may nevertheless be the inter-generational transmission of poverty. However, this direction of causality is not supported by longitudinal studies looking at families before and after they were hit by the consequences of economic depression such as the closing down of factories in the United States (Corcoran et al., 1985) and in Germany (Silbereisen et al., 1990). These studies show that the socio-emotional problems associated with poverty are the result of past changes in economic status. I will not therefore consider the possibility that most families become economically destitute as a consequence of psychological factors operating at the individual level, but will concentrate on the idea that economic hardship, which is a consequence of sociological, economic, and political factors operating at the macro level, affects children's development adversely. In other words, poverty results from macro factors operating at the level of society and children are caught in this process.

*Parental stress and child development outcomes*. In a review of research carried out in the United States, McLoyd (1990) has proposed a model for analysing how poverty and economic loss affect Afro-American children (see Fig. 1).

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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The principal assumptions of this model are that:

(a) poverty and economic loss diminish the capacity for supportive, consistent, and involved parenting; (b) a major mediator of the link between economic hardship and parenting

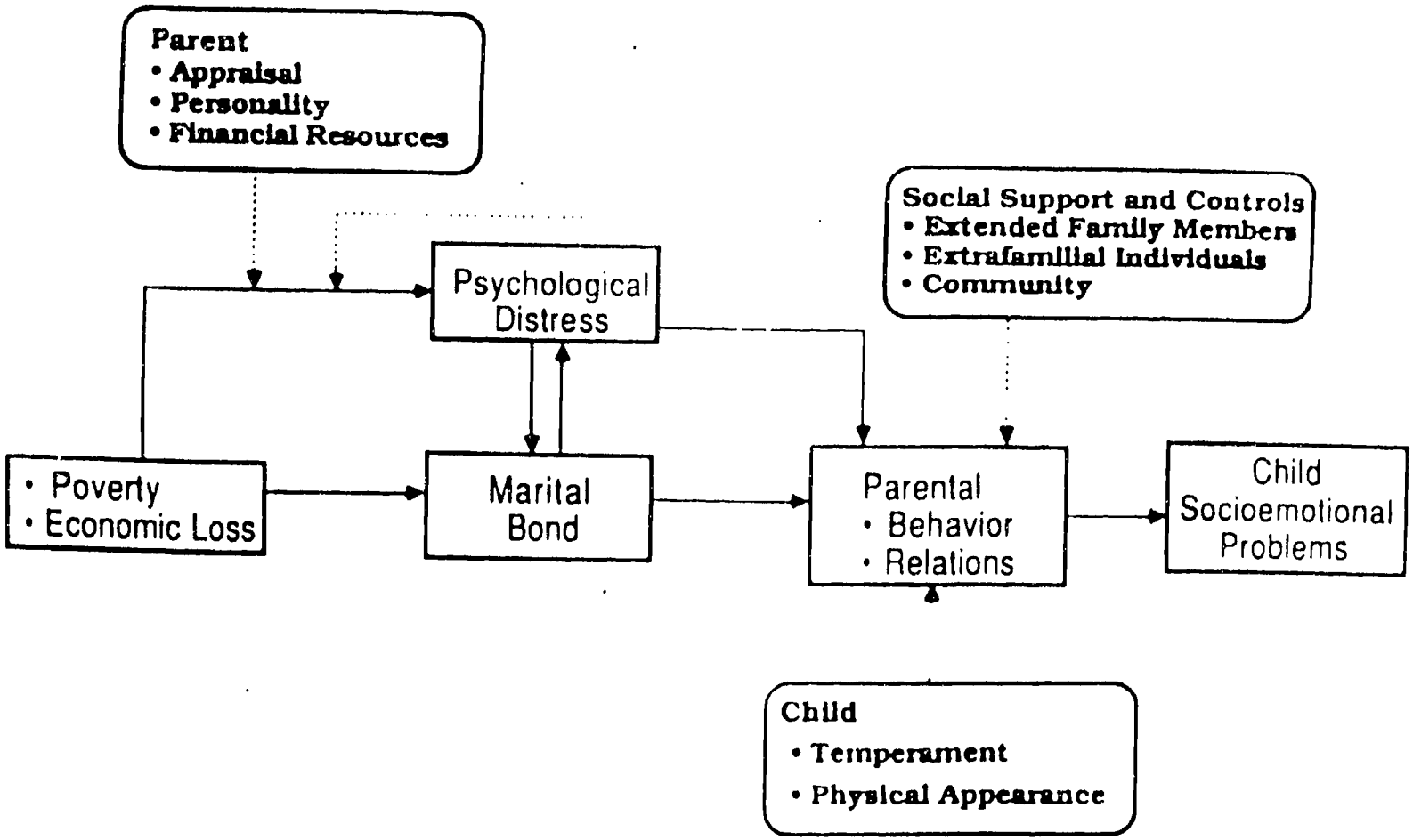
> behaviour is psychological distress deriving from an excess of negative life events, undesirable chronic conditions, and the absence and disruption of marital bonds; (c) economic loss and poverty affect children indirectly through their impact on the parent's behaviour toward the child; and (d) father-child relations under conditions of economic hardship depend on the quality of relations between the mother and the father. (McLoyd, 1990: p. 312)

The advantages of this model are its clear hypothesis about the processes that mediate the effects of poverty on children and, consequently, its contribution for planning actions. The model clearly indicates answers to the question: in a society where poverty exists and threatens children's development, how can one act upon their environment so that their development will be enhanced?

Several findings in the literature support some aspects of this model. The higher incidence of psychological distress among people suffering from chronic economic difficulties is suggested in several studies. For example, Dressler (1985) found that chronic economic distress, resulting in continuous worries about lack of money, was the strongest predictor of depression among Afro-Americans in randomly selected households. Research by Elder and his colleagues (Elder, 1979; Elder et al.,1984; Elder et al., 1985) indicated that fathers who sustained heavy financial losses became more irritable, tense, and explosive, brought stress into the marital bond and behaved in more punitive ways towards the children. In a more general fashion, Liem and Liem (1978) found an inverse relationship between socio-economic status and various forms of psychological stress and mental disorders in adults, while McLoyd and Wilson (1990) found the same inverse relationship for children. These findings confirm the existence of an association between economic hardship and distress.

A second aspect of this model - the hypothetical link between parental distress and the parents' behaviour towards the child - is supported by research which shows that distressed parents are more likely to use damaging parental behaviour than positive approaches. Gecas (1979) and Patterson and his colleagues (Patterson, 1988; Patterson et al., 1989) have observed that parental distress results in the use of more coercive and punitive forms of discipline, which in turn are associated with more antisocial behaviour in the child. McLoyd and Wilson (1990) looked more closely at the ways in which economic hardship could bring distress and in turn affect maternal behaviour: they again found evidence of a general association between economic problems and distress. They observed two basic strategies adopted by mothers: trying to generate more income, and cutting back on expenditures - buying cheaper clothes for themselves, and reducing the use of utilities at home. The latter strategy placed mothers under greater strain since the items most heavily cut were their personal requirements and their social and recreational activities. Mothers with more serious economic difficulties also discussed their financial problems with their children, a strategy that seemed to decrease rather than increase the children's ability to adjust.

A third hypothesis of the model is the deterioration of the marital bond, which also acts as a threat to children's development. Economic hardship has been found to promote marital discord both through heightened conflict (Elder, 1974) and through the increase in decision-making power of mothers (Silbereisen et al., 1990). Marital discord increases distress in the




► moderator variables

FIG. 1.—Analytic model of how poverty and economic loss affect black children
From McLoyd (1990).

parents both directly and indirectly; it can result in dissolution of the marital bond and single parenthood. Because single parenthood is associated with greater levels of anxiety and depression (Guttentag et al., 1980), the deterioration of the marital bond can amplify the negative effects of economic hardship on children's development.

A fourth aspect of the model is the role of moderator variables which may work either as buffers or as aggravating factors on the effects for children of economic hardship. McLoyd (1990) suggests that there are three types of factors that can act as buffers in circumventing or ameliorating the negative effects of poverty on children's development: (1) parents' characteristics (such as personality, appraisal of their situation, and level of resources); (2) children's characteristics (such as temperament, physical appearance); and (3) external factors (such as social support offered by the extended family, extra-familial friends, and the community).

A careful consideration of this model makes it clear that there is no inevitable determination of outcomes in terms of children's development from the starting point of poverty. If the relationship between poverty and negative effects on children's development is mediated by factors such as parental distress and parental behaviour, and if there are external moderator variables, there is room for action in favour of children's development. Such actions are related to the social support offered to parents in ways that may reduce their psychological distress, strengthen the marital bond, and influence their approach to parenting.

The actions that can successfully support parents facing economic hardship are varied. McLoyd (1990) offers a classification of such actions into (a) emotional support, (b) informational support and role modelling, (c) parenting support, and (d) exercising child-rearing sanctions and controls.

a) Emotional support is typically provided in the context of closer relationships. For a project to offer emotional support, the establishment of a personal relationship between project personnel and parents is indispensable. This relationship may be established as a side aspect of a project with other explicit goals or may be a goal in itself, if support groups are established in a professional way.

b) Informational support and role modelling is defined as the provision of useful information and advice about the management of one's home and children, associated with collaborative child care where a more experienced mother may foster sensitive parenting behaviour among inexperienced and frustrated mothers. Role modelling and informational support may sometimes work negatively within the extended family because the model is provided by persons who are also major sources of distress (Belle, 1982; Crockenberg, 1987). McLoyd and Wilson (1990) suggest that the analysis of the role of the extended family in providing support is further complicated by the fact that resident grandparents, for example, sometimes provide extra income and sometimes represent an extra source of expenditure. Separate analyses of different structures and dynamics involved in the life of extended families are still lacking.

The significance of role modelling as a mechanism in changing adverse forms of parenting is underscored in a recent study by Simons et al., (1991) who analysed the mechanism of inter-generational transmission of harsh parenting. They tested different hypotheses about these mechanisms using

path analysis and suggested that inter-generational transmission did not occur because of a change in personality outcomes of children subjected to harsh parenting but was more likely to be a result of the somewhat unconscious use of parents as role models. Harsh parenting was practised in the absence of distinguishing personality and belief characteristics. Thus outside action may have a significant role in the development of alternative role models although little work has been carried out so far to demonstrate the effectiveness of such interventions.

c) Parenting support involves the provision of assistance in child care and is frequently obtained through collaborative child care arrangements and day care centres. Parenting support seems to be an effective buffer in protecting children from the adverse effects of economic hardship; it can reduce parental stress both by allowing parents time to earn extra income and by freeing them from continuous, frustrating interactions with the children. Neighbourhood networks and professional centres can offer parenting support and at the same time offer the children opportunities for positive socio-emotional and cognitive experiences.

d) Exercise of child-rearing sanctions and controls involves direct checking of abusive behaviour towards children through purposive intervention. Reduction of punitive parental behaviour can be effected indirectly through the provision of child care arrangements that affect the children's behaviour and improve their relationship with the parents, and directly through the exercise of a protective role by others who are involved with the child. Elder (1979) found that fathers under economic stress were less likely to be abusive to their children if the mother was protective of them and King and Fullard (1982) reported that teenage mothers who lived with their parents were less punitive to their children as a result of the parents' intervention.

Moderator variables at the child level can also be the object of intervention. There are at least two ways in which this intervention can be conceived on the basis of the findings discussed above. First, there is the possibility of increasing the support network available to the children. McLoyd and Wilson (1990) found that an important protective factor in the lives of those children who were functioning well socio-emotionally and educationally, despite living in poverty, was their involvement in social networks that offered them support. They found that both the number of non-relative adults in children's network and the diversification of the roles they played (helping with the homework, listening to the child, etc.) were predictors of positive adjustment whereas the number of peers did not correlate with improved adjustment. These results, obtained in a large sample study (N = 155), were important in confirming findings of previous case studies of 'survivors' from poor environments (Werner and Smith, 1982; Williams and Kornblum, 1985), which indicated that all of these children had encountered in their lives a significant adult who inspired in them confidence in their ability to succeed in spite of obstacles.

A second type of project that can operate at the level of the child in moderating the effects of poverty is related to self-concept or self-confidence. It is suggested in the findings mentioned above that lack of self-confidence may result in greater reliance on peer evaluation and a consequent distancing from parental norms and rules. It is possible that actions at the child level which increase self-confidence will enhance the child's use of parents and other family members as support and role models.

However, it is important here to bear in mind that self-confidence may appear in such studies as a moderator variable but may actually be the result of other factors not hitherto identified in the research. In that case, self-confidence may prove difficult to change or, even if enhanced, the changes obtained may not show the desired outcomes. Willig et al. (1983) conducted a study of Afro-American children in the metropolitan area of Chicago who were not achieving well in school; they found that their self-concept was as high at that of their white schoolmates, who were performing much better. Explanations of school failure (and other adaptation difficulties) which rely on low self-esteem, anxiety, and attribution patterns characteristic of the children who are not achieving well were clearly confronted in this comprehensive study.

In sum, McLoyd's (1990) model is useful for its explicit analysis of the processes by which poverty threatens children's development and because it points out possible types of intervention. It also uncovers a possible reason for failure of intervention programmes: the treatment of parents, in a sense, as independent variables that can be manipulated without due concern for their well-being. Projects that aim at changing parents' attitudes and behaviour without concern for their own psychological state may fail as a consequence of the stress which parents face, in spite of their best intentions to support their children.

However, some criticisms can also be levelled at the model; these reflect the complexity of environmental effects on children's development. First, the model does not take into account the possibility of direct links between poverty and negative child development outcomes. The link between parental distress as a consequence of economic hardship and their children's poor socio-emotional adjustment is well established but this may not be the only way in which economic hardship affects children. Direct effects have already been documented in the literature by Conger et al. (1984) and Silbereisen et al. (1990): these studies found evidence for the persistence of effects of economic hardship on children's adjustment even after the factors involved in parental distress were removed. Silbereisen et al. (1990) suggest that economic hardship makes children more self-conscious (as a consequence of having cheaper clothes and less access to material goods), more sensitive to peer evaluation, and thus more prone to deviate from rules and norms accepted by the parents. It must be emphasised that the subjects in these studies were pre-adolescents and adolescents, and that the effects of poverty may differ for children at different ages; for example, the personal factors involved in the direct effects described by Silbereisen et al. may not operate at lower age levels.

Second, other aspects of parental management strategies influence children's developmental outcomes without being directly related to parents' stress and negative interactions with their children. Filp et al. (1993) and Jarrett (1993) have independently suggested that the strategies used by parents to deal with the fact that their children are growing up in high-risk neighbourhoods have an impact on their development. For example, the most successful parents used a combination of methods that included monitoring their children's time in the neighbourhood and developing an alliance with growth-enhancing institutions such as church groups and scouts (Jarrett, 1993). Programmes that help parents develop strategies for dealing with their high-risk neighbourhoods can therefore have a moderator effect on the relationship between poverty and child development. This may at first glance seem the type of action which only benefits older children and adolescents.

However, it must not be forgotten that one of the highest risk groups for persistent poverty is the group of teenage mothers. There is an important sense in which decreasing the incidence of teenage pregnancy is a valuable strategy for the protection of children.

Finally, it must be pointed out that the preceding analysis cannot take into account the situation of children without families, even though institutionalised children constitute an important group of poor children because they have no income at all. There are, as a rule, no provisions for their higher education and no possibility of investments in their development beyond a certain age. The analysis of the developmental trajectories of institutionalised children would certainly require specific models.

*Growing up with discrimination*

One of the aspects of poverty we have not yet discussed is discrimination. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) have observed, there are, in the public behaviour and attitudes of the rich and the poor, imperceptible differences which never fail to be perceived. Besides financial resources, the dominant classes also inherit a cultural capital which guarantee them a head start in school and in society. I now want to turn to the difficulties of growing up with discrimination. Much of what what follows applies to poor children: however, the discussion will largely reflect on the problems faced by children who are discriminated against as a consequence of their ethnic, religious, and cultural background.

Ogbu (1988) has suggested that, for students of human development, a useful definition of culture is:

> a way of life shared by members of a population. It is the social, technoeconomic, and psychological adaptation worked out in the course of a people's history. Culture includes customs or institutionalized public behaviours, as well as thoughts and emotions that accompany and support those public behaviours. It includes artifacts - things people make or have made that have symbolic meaning. Particularly important is that the definition of culture includes people's economic, political, religious, and social institutions - the imperatives of culture. (Ogbu, 1988: p. 11)

It is a platitude to say that all children live in a culture: it is as unproblematic to be Mexican in Mexico, as it is to be Chinese in China, or American in the USA. However, it does seem to be problematic to grow up with the customs and institutionalised public behaviours of one culture while living with the social institutions of another. Under these circumstances, ethnic stratification can often be observed. In this case, the ethnic groups are caste-like 'minorities incorporated into a society more or less involuntarily and permanently through slavery, conquest, and colonization' (Ogbu, 1987: p. 258). Children are then exposed to a so-called 'host-culture' and a 'minority-culture'.

The tradition of studies concerning children from minority groups has been to look at 'what is wrong with the minority culture' assuming a superiority in the ways of behaving and child-rearing patterns of the host culture. Ogbu (1988) has strongly questioned this assumption. Racism, he points out, has

so heavily taxed humans through history that it would not be improper to include it as a psychopathological condition, a failure of a (politically dominant) culture to deal with another. It would seem vital for our understanding of minority children's environments to analyse the characteristics of the host culture which threaten their well-being and their development. It is likely that they would benefit just as much from changes in mainstream society that resulted in more openness towards them as they would from programmes in which they are directly involved. However, it is not possible to review such studies here, as existing research has concentrated on minority groups and has left the characteristics of the host culture undescribed. Research on what leads certain host cultures - but not others - to define some groups - but not others - as minority groups is clearly necessary if we want to understand the nature of the barriers that immigrant and minority-group children have to overcome as they grow up.

The living conditions that restrict the development of one group of minority children in one country may be very different from those which militate against the development of another minority group elsewhere. It may be necessary to look for diverse factors when considering, for example, the difficulties of black children in South Africa and those of black children in the USA. Yet, it may still be possible to learn some lessons from looking at factors that are related to the adjustment of one group of minority children in one place when trying to understand the plight of another group.

Harrison et al. (1990) have suggested that similar patterns can be observed in the family ecologies and adaptation efforts of four different minority groups in the United States, namely Afro-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. They point out that, like poverty, the ecological challenges facing ethnic minorities are not sudden temporary economic calamities, but derive from a long history of oppression and discrimination which is manifest in the maintenance of the minority groups in a disadvantaged position in society. 'On all of the major social indicators (e.g., employment, housing, health, etc.) of individual and social well-being, gaps persist - and in some instances are widening - between members of minority groups and the majority population' (Harrison et al., 1990: p. 349).

The way in which the minority group entered the host culture appears to be a significant factor. Heath and McLaughlin (1988) point out, for example, that Vietnamese children entered the USA mostly through the support of religious groups. These children benefit from different networks for support in their development and appear to have fewer difficulties than Mexican pupils in facing school. Their adaptation patterns may not be similar even to those of other Asian children.

Aspects of disadvantage

Coll (1990) discusses several aspects of minority children's environment that relate to their being maintained at a disadvantage in society. Like Bronfenbrenner (1986), Coll emphasises the need to consider these aspects as dynamic; they are not independent factors, but are embedded in contextual systems that create feedback loops. The five factors which Coll highlights are: (1) cultural beliefs and care-giving practices; (2) health status and health care practices; (3) family structure and characteristics; (4) socio-economic factors; and (5) biological factors.

*Cultural beliefs and care-giving practices*. Considerable differences have been found in these two aspects across cultures: it is therefore likely that ethnic minorities will share among themselves practices which differ in some way from the host culture. Ogbu (1988) has stressed the importance, in the analysis of care-giving practices, of distinguishing between the maturational outcomes of development and the cultural outcomes. Maturational outcomes are universal, and will be observed in any culture; cultural outcomes are related to the fact that different cultural groups are faced with different tasks requiring diverse abilities, or even the same ability in diverse forms. This distinction is supported in a study by Chisholm (1983), who analysed the different care practices of Navajo and Anglo-American mothers. Navajo infants are bound to a cradle board, have continuous access to the care giver, are breast-fed often and over a long period of time, and are not subject to early avoidance training. These characteristics influence mother-infant face to face interaction, resulting in lower mutual responsiveness and levels of activity. However, Chisholm observed that these patterns of interaction were transient and did not apply to interactions when the child was not bound to the cradle board. Despite the considerable differences in care practices, maturational behaviours (such as walking, fear of strangers, and distress at maternal departure) were all observed among these infants, although the specific time of onset and the subsequent course of these behaviours may have varied across cultures.

In contrast, cultural outcomes quite clearly vary across cultures. In a comparison of child-rearing goals across eight different cultures, Howrigan (1988) has observed marked differences in what mothers were trying to accomplish and the characteristics they would value most in their children when the child reached school-age or adulthood. Ogbu (1988) has pointed out that 'the culturally approved strategy for upward social mobility (among middle-class Anglo-Americans), the strategy for getting ahead, stressed individual competition, drive, and initiative' (p. 14). If these qualities do not constitute an important part of the values underlying the child-rearing practices of a minority group, but only of the host culture, then children socialised into a different pattern will find their choices limited in the host culture.

Cultural outcomes may also be shaped by the work environment of the parents, as Bronfenbrenner (1986) showed in his review of the family as a context for human development, and may vary across groups within a society. 'Kohn (1969) demonstrated that working-class men whose jobs typically required compliance with authority tended to hold values that stressed obedience in their children; by contrast, middle-class fathers expected self-direction and independence, the qualities called for by the demands of their occupation' (Bronfenbrenner, 1986: p. 728). Such differences in values do not mean much *per se* and have been found in cross-cultural studies of child-rearing practices and goals (Hoffman, 1988). However, they acquire more sinister connotations when the values fostered by a minority group are in conflict with those of the dominant culture.

Finally, mothers may also view their role in different ways across cultures and have correspondingly different expectations about what certain public institutions will do for their children. In a comparison of mothers' views of their role in their children's learning, teaching strategies used, and types of instruction given, Coll (1990) showed that US, Mexican, and Chinese mothers differed in all these respects. A most significant difference was

found between Anglo-American and Mexican-American mothers: the former did not see themselves as teachers and expected schools to take responsibility for teaching, while the latter accepted much more responsibility for teaching their children and preparing them for school. These differences in attitude are significant especially in view of the fact that school teachers expect mothers to take part in the teaching process. Children whose mothers' and teachers' views are mismatched get caught in the middle. Jarrett (1993) illustrates this point rather well through the teachers' and mothers' own expressions. Some teachers of Afro-American children believe that the children are not supported at home and for this reason do not learn in school, that their parents do not care, and therefore that school resources are wasted on them. At the same time, parents expect schools to take full responsibility for their children's instruction, as reflected in this excerpt from an interview: 'That's what the school's for, ain't it? I ain't no school-teacher. If we do it all before he gets to school the teacher won't have nothing to do' (Moore Jr., 1969: p. 184).

*Health status and health care practices.* The health status of minority groups often differs from that of the members of the host culture. Coll (1990) has summarised contrasts between various minority groups in the US and the Anglo-Americans, and has highlighted differences in life-expectancy, infant mortality, prematurity and low birth weight, and other health problems such as anaemia and some infectious diseases. Some of these problems, such as low birth weight and anaemia, can become part of the process of injuring children's development, both directly (anaemia is associated with decreased attentiveness, fatigue, and longer latency in reaction time, and is thus likely to interfere with learning), and indirectly (low birth weight infants raised in poverty-stricken, stressful environments show a higher incidence of neurodevelopmental deviations; see Escalona, 1982). Medical models often assume that health hazards have inevitable consequences for development, but research inspired by transactional and synergistic models of development have modified the expectations for infants with health problems but without major anomalies. Zeskind and Ramey (1981) have suggested that such health problems can be viewed as involving differential demand characteristics of the infant at birth that contribute to the infant's creation of and response to the care-giving environment. They have successfully shown in a longitudinal experiment with foetally malnourished infants that it is possible to intervene in the care-giving environment in a way that interrupts the cycle of events unfavourable for the child's development.

Health care practices of minority groups have also been found to differ from those of the host culture for a number of reasons. Cultural and economic factors often act as barriers for minority groups to seek out services available in their community, both because of costs and as a result of their belief in different approaches to health maintenance and treatment. Moreover, the introduction of 'modern' health practices into 'traditional' cultures without a comprehensive approach may have not only the desired, positive effects, but also some negative effects that loop back into the host of difficulties faced by minority families. Howrigan (1988) reports on one such case among Yucatec parents in Oxkutzcab, Mexico. Health facilities installed in the region included a small, poorly equipped government clinic, staffed by recent graduates who never gained the confidence of Yucatec parents. They would bring their children in for inoculations and minor complaints, but take them to the major town hospital for more serious problems. Although poor sanitary conditions, the tropical climate, and lack

of hygiene made bottle feeding to this group of infants hazardous, local physicians supported bottle feeding and provided antibiotics to treat the resulting gastrointestinal diseases. They did not become involved with broader health counselling, including birth control and advice about spacing of children. Thus, according to Howrigan (1988: p. 39):

> Yucatec parents in Oxkutzcab face health considerations for their children that are very much a mixture of the modern and the traditional. Their goals for infants - that they should be fat, healthy, and quiet - come from the past. 'Modern' feeding methods and Western medicine are broadly accepted. At the same time, the environment still presents a considerable hazard, and even the youngest families still resort to traditional Mayan magico-religious healers. (Howrigan, 1988: p. 39)

At the same time, medical treatment has increased the number of surviving children, so that a woman in the age range 26-35 has already had more pregnancies and has more live children than her grandmother, in the age range above 46. With shorter periods between pregnancies and more children to look after, the young Yucatec mother also has more difficulties providing for her children.

*Family structure and characteristics*. Minority families have been traditionally characterised as extended rather than nuclear families. This difference may be a cultural one, reflecting cultural origins, or it may constitute an adaptive strategy, as suggested by Harrison et al. (1990). In their analysis, adaptive strategies refer to observable social, behavioural and cultural patterns that may be adaptive or maladaptive in the long run. The extended family structure may be an adaptive strategy in an immigrant family where more people can offer their work capacity and contribute to child care with a smaller amount of resources spent towards the support of individuals. The extended family structure is assumed (Harrison et al., 1990; Hoffman, 1988) to foster values such as obedience and interdependency, which conflict with those qualities of competitiveness and independence fostered in many Western societies. Once again, it becomes clear that the advantages of belonging to a culture that fosters interdependence are often overshadowed when minority children grow up with institutions that support other forms of public behaviour.

Heath and McLaughlin (1988) also point out the difficulties faced by immigrant families in their contacts with schools. Discussing the position of migrants of Mexican origin, they stress three significant points. First, the children bring to school different amounts and types of cultural (including linguistic) capital to apply to the task of schooling. Linguistic differences are easily construed by teachers as 'linguistic deprivation', as Reeves and Chevannes (1988) have shown, adding to the difficulties of minority children. Second, in many other cultures the traditional orientation to learning is by observing and assuming apprenticeship roles beside knowledgeable elders. When children from such cultures come to a school where teaching and knowledge display are expected to take a verbal form, these children will be at a disadvantage. Finally, when schools attempt to involve parents from these families in the educational process, the parents often feel inadequate and insecure. They are reluctant or unable to present their views, and simply accept the teachers' authority, 'erroneously believing that by listening, remaining quiet, and obeying, their children will achieve school success and preparation for better jobs

than the low-skilled service jobs the parents perform' (Heath and McLaughlin, 1988: p. 335).

In short, there are many ways in which family structures and characteristics can vary across cultures. When only one way is adopted in mainstream society, children socialised under different patterns will be at a disadvantage and are likely to become objects of prejudice.

*Socio-economic factors*. The effects of economic hardship were discussed at some length in the preceding section: nonetheless, it is worth stressing again here that ethnic minorities tend to be, and to remain, in economically unfavourable positions.

From the social viewpoint, as McLoyd (1990) has emphasised, ethnic minorities face extra difficulties and further barriers in the form of prejudice. Prejudice, although a difficult term to define, is not an abstract concept for ethnic minority children, but a reality in everyday life. In an ethnographic study of two schools in England, Wright (1988) illustrates how children and their parents have to defend themselves against discrimination in the classroom - a process that does not help them in their future relationships with teachers in school. Two examples from the recorded interactions are illustrative.

> Teacher (to the researcher): '... I had a girl in my class, she did something or another. I said to her, if you're not careful I'll send you back to the chocolate factory. She went home and told her parents, her dad came up to school, and decided to take the matter to the Commission for Racial Equality. It was said in good fun, nothing malicious'.
>
> Keith (angrily): 'Those so-called jokes, were no joke, you were being cheeky... My father says that a teacher should set a good example for the children, by respecting each one, whether them black or white. He says that any teacher who makes comments like that in front of a class, shouldn't be in school...'. (Wright, 1988: p. 200)

The second example is of prejudice against West Indian pupils observed in a conversation with an Afro-American (and probably sympathetic) teacher:

> It is always assumed that they are intellectually inferior, what else is there for them to do [but be aggressive]... every time teachers are constantly amazed by the fact that in the first year they have at the moment - there [are] two or three really bright West Indian boys, and it's of constant amazement to people like Mr. G... 'my goodness he's bright, where does he get it from' (Wright, 1988: p. 201).

It is not necessary to dwell on the fact that minority groups are the object of discrimination and prejudice; the point of these examples is to show how open prejudice can be and how children's awareness and attempts to defend themselves against it may result in further trouble for them.

*Biological factors*. Although Coll lists 'biological factors' as a significant aspect in the analysis of developmental outcomes of minority children, her review of the literature on this topic does not lead to any definite conclusions:

> As a whole, the role of biological factors in determining developmental outcomes of minority infants and their interplay with the prenatal and postnatal environment is not well documented. More dynamic models (and statistical analyses) need to be employed to ascertain how biological and environmental factors provide a possible range of outcomes and how the individual actualizes a unique combination of them. (Coll, 1990 pp. 282-83)

The difficulty that Coll encounters in coming to clear conclusions does not mean that biological factors do not play a role in development; rather it indicates that there may not be biological characteristics that distinguish minorities and affect their development in negative ways. However, as mentioned earlier, minority groups often have poorer nutrition and health care because they typically face economic hardship; these risk factors, when interacting with other environmental characteristics, tend to produce negative child development outcomes.

The review of factors to consider in describing the environment of children growing up with prejudice still offers a hazy basis for action. There are no models that allow one to distinguish between the processes by which these variables affect children's development. Yet it is important to distinguish between models because different processes indicate different routes to change. What needs to be explained is the inter-generational transmission of cultural patterns and the relationship between cultural patterns and individual development. Do cultures succeed in this inter-generational transmission because they determine individual personality? Do they operate by maintaining relatively stable environments, tasks, and challenges to the individuals? Is inter-generational continuity guaranteed by role modelling, with or without awareness of the patterns that are repeated and their value? How can inter-generational continuity be obtained in such a way that there is no rupture between the young and the old, and consequently no destruction or domination of the minority group by the host culture? How can children learn the routes to success in the host culture without breaking away from the traditional values?

An interesting step in the direction of model testing on this issue of inter-generational transmission was made by Simons et al. (1991) in a study of harsh parenting. Although their study was conducted with white families only, their findings may be relevant in this context. They tested models which assumed that inter-generational transmission was accomplished either by beliefs, or by personality changes in the children, or by imitation of parental behaviour. Their findings indicated that the only model that could be supported was the transmission through imitation of parental behaviour because neither personality characteristics nor beliefs about parenting were predictive of harsh parenting. If further evidence can be obtained that contradicts the idea of inter-generational transmission of adult patterns through mediation by personality characteristics, one could be more optimistic about the role that projects will have in successfully maintaining the culture of origin while at the same time showing paths to adaptation in the host culture.

A significant route for action in support of children growing up with prejudice has been suggested by recent research on bicultural and monocultural mothers and children. With respect to mothers, Gutierrez and Sameroff (1990) observed that bicultural Mexican-American mothers had more

sophisticated views of child rearing than monocultural mothers, either Mexican-American or Anglo-American, when educational level was controlled for: maternal intelligence and adherence to traditional cultural values were not found to correlate significantly with the level of sophistication. This result suggests that accommodation to the host culture by giving up traditional forms of behaviour and adopting modal behaviour of the host country (as defined by Garcia and Lega, 1979) may not be the best choice for ethnic minorities.

With respect to children's developmental trajectories, Heath (1988) has obtained results which suggest that biculturalism may benefit children's development. She contrasted two groups of Afro-Americans, both of which had been socialised into using Black Vernacular English, but to different degrees. Middle-class children used Black Vernacular English and standard English equally comfortably in interactions whereas the working-class children only used Black Vernacular English as their language of interaction, resorting to standard English in limited circumstances (such as addressing a head teacher in school or acting out the part of a white character when telling stories). Heath's description suggests that the first group of children was much more genuinely bicultural than the latter, and that this flexibility afforded them advantages and greater chances of success in school. Laosa (1977) has also suggested that biculturalism allows the person to learn to function optimally in more than one context and switch repertoires of behaviour adaptively and appropriately as a function of the situation.

Difficulties in developing a bicultural orientation are probably more noticeable when the minority group is clearly identified by race. Spencer (1988) has reviewed this issue with respect to self-concept among Afro-American adolescents, and has stressed the positive role played by those parents who rely on strategies which reinforce their children's use of other Afro-Americans as their group of reference, thereby reducing possible negative results of the adoption of Eurocentric references that include the devaluation of their culture and race.

Despite these convergent trends, it must be said that evidence is still not clear on the processes resulting in positive and negative effects of bicultural adaptation for groups and individuals, and little is known about the characteristics of the environment that allow for, or prevent, successful bicultural adaptation. For example, work on the effects of integrated schools on the development of black children has been inconclusive. In a review of the literature, Pande and Tripathi (1982) suggested that cognitive gains by black children can be observed side by side with the development of negative self-images. For pupils of different castes in India, these authors observed that the integration of scheduled caste pupils into high caste schools was clearly associated with lower achievement motivation and more negative self-images. On the other hand, one might ask whether the consequences of segregated schools are not much worse both for the development of minority children and for the battle against prejudice in society.

All in all, it seems premature at this stage to attempt to build a model for the consequences of discrimination for children's development, although the main factors can be picked out. First, according to diverse types of socio-economic indicators, it does seem that minorities which suffer discrimination are kept at a disadvantage in society. Belonging to a group

that is discriminated against in a society is not akin to a sudden calamity but is a plight that results from a long process of domination. Second, adaptation to such a situation may show similar characteristics across different minority groups in the same society. Third, the cultural beliefs, care practices, and goals of the minority group and the host culture may be in conflict. If the ethnic minority also speaks a different language and has traditionally relied on different approaches to teaching and learning at home, children will have a devalued 'cultural capital' to invest in their adaptation outside the home: in this case, children are literally caught in the middle between two cultures. Fourth, prejudice represents special difficulties for minority children. Their awareness of prejudice and their attempts at self-defence may further their difficulties, for example in relating to prejudiced teachers. On the other hand, if they are unaware of prejudice, they are likely to internalise the negative images of their own people that pervade society. Fifth, as Brah and Minas (1988) have suggested, the notion of cultural conflict has permeated schools with often damaging consequences for minority children. Cultural conflict has become the common explanation for minority children's difficulties, obliterating the very real prejudice they have to face. Finally, although successful adaptation has often been observed in bicultural parents and children, the path to this successful adaptation is not yet clear.

CHAPTER THREE

## Final considerations

The analysis of the literature presented here suggests that any model for intervention in children's socio-cultural environment should take account of a number of factors. Let us conclude this paper by summarising the major considerations.

(1) In order to intervene on children's behalf, we need to take a child-centred perspective. This means that models considered adaptive because they guarantee the survival of a group may be questioned because of the level of suffering that they impose on children. A child-centred model also implies a choice of indicators of programme success which differs from those that might be chosen if an economic perspective were to be adopted. In the economic evaluation of a project one may consider, for example, whether the number of work hours in a family has increased without regard for who cares for the children when the mother goes to work. A child-centred programme will evaluate its success by analysing whether children are receiving better care, living happier lives, and developing more fully.

(2) A child-centred perspective requires considering both the culture in which the child lives and broader perspectives on child development. On one hand, within the child's cultural group there are desired child development outcomes that should not be overlooked. Moreover, children growing under difficult circumstances often develop strengths that are not part of the mainstream model of childhood. Programmes need to build on these strengths for their success. On the other hand, the conditions that brought about some of these strengths may be deplorable and need not be maintained. For example, although children who work may develop an adult sense of responsibility at an early age, their need to abandon school in order to work must be questioned.

(3) Socio-cultural circumstances that threaten children's development often form part of a system of chronic difficulties. Although one risk factor may not damage children's development, the interaction of risk factors seems to have multiplicative effects. Thus actions on children's environments must aim at affecting several factors simultaneously.

(4) The inter-generational transmission of socio-cultural disadvantages is mediated through different processes such as parental stress, neighbourhood conditions, quality of health care and schools, availability of support groups etc. Actions on behalf of children can thus also aim at supporting parents, improving health care, schools, and neighbourhood conditions, and developing and supporting growth-enhancing institutions within the community. A significant contribution of McLoyd's work in this context was to point out that parental educational strategies cannot be treated as independent from parental well-being and that programmes which aim to improve children's welfare need to take this point into account.

(5) Finally, many of the difficulties facing children who grow up in environments which threaten their development are exacerbated by the prejudice to which these children are exposed. For example, children who need to learn two languages, one at home and one in school, clearly have more developmental tasks than monolingual children. This extra effort brings with it some advantages which are quickly turned into disadvantages by

societies. In school, the children often face prejudices that further threaten their development. With a smaller amount of 'linguistic capital' to invest in school, they often end up being seen as 'linguistically deprived'. In order to foster the development of these children, it is important to consider not only direct actions in their immediate environments but also actions that will undermine prejudice and demolish the barriers it builds against the children's development.

## Afterword

### The environment of the child: implications for programme development
by Rekha Wazir

### Research and intervention practice: need for a dialogue

The intervention programmes of the majority of development agencies are rarely guided by theoretical considerations. In general, organisations operate within the parameters set by their respective mandates which limit the area within which they may work, the target groups they may serve and the methodology they employ. Their programmes are shaped by demands from the field, which in turn are developed in response to needs, availability of funds or current trends in development practice. Developments in research and theory are seldom used as guiding principles when formulating projects. Similarly, experience gained in the implementation of intervention projects is seldom accorded the status of research. This is as true of development theory in general as it is of specific disciplines such as child development, to mention a field which is central to the Foundation's work. Thus, even while sharing common concerns, theoreticians and practitioners generally form two ends of a spectrum with very little dialogue or cross-fertilisation between the extremes.

Originating as a donor organisation with the specific mandate to improve conditions for disadvantaged children, the Foundation's intervention strategies have gradually evolved over the twenty or so years of its existence. The outcome has been a steady trend towards becoming a development organisation with specific expertise in the area of early childhood development (ECD). The change from donor to development agency has been facilitated by accumulated hands-on experience in working in 'development issues' as well as by reference to a growing body of related literature and research. Thus in giving shape and direction to its global programme, theoretical insights as well as grassroots know how are drawn upon. Individual projects and country programmes are usually assessed in terms of developmental criteria such as a concern for empowerment, the role of women, cultural sensitivity, community development, human rights, the role of statutory and non-governmental organisations, and sustainable development.

The Foundation's position as a specialised organisation for young children is less firmly rooted in ECD theory and an interplay between research and practice in this discipline is less evident in its global programme. Advances in child development research and theory do not form the underpinnings of field projects and if used at all they are greatly diluted or generalised and make little or no significant impact on the day to day implementation of programmes. This observation applies, in an even more stark way, to larger scale intervention programmes for children.

In a more general context, attention to this lack of dialogue between ECD theory and practice has been drawn most recently by Myers (1991; 1992) who contends that the state of the art is ahead of the current state of practice. Awareness of this gap and attempts to bridge it are gradually being reflected on the agendas of international organisations concerned with the welfare of children as well as of academic bodies. In fact, individuals placed between these two poles and intermediary organisations, with their

growing cadres of 'activists who think or, thinkers who act' (Galjaart 1993), may well form the needed and missing link between the worlds of theory and practice. In presenting her insights on the environment of the child, Terezinha Nunes also speaks the language of the intermediator and her ideas are, therefore, likely to find a warm reception among academics, programmers and practitioners.

## Pointers for programme development

A comment on the **process** by which Nunes' paper was produced may be instructive. The original request to write a paper on the 'Environment of the Child' was made after a series of consultations with Foundation staff, who in their turn sought to reflect the concerns of their project partners. At an early stage, Nunes had discussions with Foundation staff, and the first draft of her paper was discussed in two workshops held in Mexico and India. On both occasions, practitioners as well as researchers from the region commented on the text. The present paper, then, is the outcome of the sort of dialogue between theory and practice that the Foundation seeks to pursue. Foundation staff and the staff of projects and programmes it supports, will look for guidelines that give direction to their work and that will explain and provide a conceptual framework for the discoveries, successes and failures encountered in working with children. They will also look for assistance and inspiration in designing strategies for new situations and in predicting and assessing child related outcomes. Similarly, field testing should help to refine, adjust and extend these principles so as to maintain and improve their value.

Nunes provides the following important pointers that have an immediate relevance for the Foundation's programme:

### Children as beneficiaries

As participants in the general discourse on development issues, the Foundation has been tempted to look at children as 'entry points' for integrated human development programmes. In doing so, the interests or well-being of children were seen as means to an end, instead of being the end in themselves. Nunes makes a strong case for making children's development the central concern of ECD intervention programmes and for remaining focused on child-related outcomes. This implies that in conceptualising programmes it is important to ensure that children are given top priority. The inclusion of community development or income generation components should be assessed in terms for their beneficial spin-offs for children rather than as the main objective of such projects. In fact, this argument could be taken even further by stating that ECD interventions should focus on children as children, and not necessarily as future school learners, or adults.

### Concept of Childhood

The concept of childhood, Nunes argues, is a social construct that varies over time and culture. The corollary is that the appreciation of outcomes are equally varied as different cultures present different development tasks for children. Intervention programmes should be sensitive to these cultural differences, rather than following a universal model of development.

Translated into the practice of programme development this would mean that the content and direction of programmes should be decided locally and should be in accordance with the value systems of the people they seek to benefit. External donor agencies should play the role of sympathetic listeners, or at best critical sparring partners. However - and Nunes would agree - cultural values sometimes have to be challenged in the best interests of children. This raises the question of how far external agents should go as there is often a thin dividing line between challenging and imposing. There is no satisfactory answer to this dilemma: issues such as child labour, female infanticide, or female circumcision can at times set external agents and local cultures against one another. The views of parents, local institutions, national agencies and external agents, like the Foundation regarding child development outcomes cannot always be easily reconciled.

**Mediating factors**

Following McLoyd, Nunes lists three mediating factors i.e. parent's characteristics, children's characteristics and extra familial factors, which can mitigate the negative impact of poverty on children's development. Intervention programmes could thus aim to enhance the well-being of parents and the self-confidence of children and create external support systems for both. Concern for parental well-being and the need for support groups finds ready reflection in the majority of Foundation-sponsored intervention projects. A review of the Foundation's programme of field projects reveal that most of them address the well-being of parents and seek to break the isolation of families, particulary of the mothers. While most of these projects seek to directly benefit young children, over 70 percent also list 'parental education' and 'community development' as secondary objectives.

Activities enhancing the self-confidence of children are not so easily programmed; often the assumption is that self-confidence is an automatic outcome of the first two factors, and of children being enrolled in creches, playgroups, or pre-schools. It will be a new challenge to understand this process of improving children's self-perception and confidence and to incorporate it in intervention programmes.

**Interventions for children: a joint venture**

The three crucial components identified by Nunes appear to be the common stock of most Foundation-supported projects and are likely to be found in a host of other similar interventions as well. The significance of the findings lies, therefore, not so much in its innovative impact as in its validation of field experience and in helping to place this in a theoretical and conceptual framework. The fortunate circumstance of finding theory and practice in accordance with each other does not imply that no further initiatives are required. It is obvious that many more, theoretical as well as practical, questions related to parental well-being, the self-confidence of children and support groups remain to be posed and explored. While it is sufficiently well understood that these factors are crucial, and there is a fair idea of **how** they operate, it is not yet clear **why** they result in the observed effects. Practitioners and researchers will have to join forces in addressing these issues: the former will have to formulate questions relevant to their work and offer their experience for critical examination; while the latter could contribute by addressing these questions, and posing

## Interventions for children and macro factors

The advice by Nunes not to get involved in macro politics or to expect changes in the macro system as a result of interventions for children is judicious up to a point. In everyday practice, programmers **have** to work towards enhancing children's development within the constraints imposed by poverty, to take Nunes' example. It would, however, be impossible to mount programmes without linking them to the overall socio-political milieu or without awareness of the impact of national or regional policies on the lives of children and their families. Programmers have 'to act locally' but at the same time 'think globally' as well. This is particularly relevant for programmes which intend to go to scale and which have to interact with the wider macro system. **Advocacy** and **social mobilisation** which emerge from and build on project experience could be pivotal processes in this interaction with the macro system. It is not inconceivable that the efforts of intervention programmes could directly result in improved legislation for children.

## Children as shapers of their environment

Implicit in Nunes' text is the assumption that children largely determine their own environment, or at least are very active participants in this process. This idea, which is increasingly being borne out by experience and theory, has consequences for programme development and would, in principle, radically change conventional approaches. Development agents have now accepted that the poor and women should have a voice in their own development: the next group that has to be taken seriously seems to be the children themselves.

## Concluding remark

Nunes' work reinforces and validates the experience gained by the Foundation through more than two decades of involvement with young children and their families. It also offers new paths that beg for exploration. In its position as a specialised agency for children, the Foundation is well poised to play the role of initiator and broker in continuing this search.

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new ones. The new models developed would, in turn, have to be tested through implementation.

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