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ABSTRACT

This booklet discusses the many individual ways in which boys and girls develop their self-concepts, and points out that often a child's picture of himself may not be a true one; it may have come to him through adults who see him through blinders which may come from biases concerning certain ethnic or cultural groups and which prevent the adults from seeing him as he really is. Geared to educators, the document suggests ways in which teachers can help children to achieve greater self-respect as they learn about their own ethnic backgrounds and the part their people have played in building our country. (Author/HMV)

Children's views of themselves

By Ira J. Gordon

Association for Childhood Education International

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Acknowledgment by Ira J. Gordon
As in all that I've written, I wish to acknowledge how much I owe to my wife, Esther L. Gordon, for her knowledge and wisdom in caring for and raising our children Gary and Bonnie, and for not only supporting my efforts but teaching me so much.

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Foreword

GLADYS GARDNER JENKINS

As teachers we spend many hours studying the children in our classrooms. Most of us do try to find out what each youngster is like so that we may teach him more effectively. We put together all the objective material which we can obtain which will throw light upon a child's personality and his development. Then we add our personal impressions and those of other teachers the youngster has had in the past years. We turn, when we can, to the parents and ask them to help us know their child. But how often do we take into account or even seriously try to discover what a child thinks about himself? Yet we know that a child's picture of himself may color all his relationships in the classroom and his very ability to learn that which we want to teach.

Ira Gordon has made the feelings of children about themselves come alive for us. One cannot read his lively and sympathetic material without looking at the children in one's classroom with new eyes and a deepened perception of their personal feelings and genuine ego-building needs. He helps us to gain insight into the many individual ways in which boys and girls develop their concept of the self. He interprets the behavior signals which are a child's way of communicating his opinion of himself to us. The author points up the fact that so often a child's picture of himself may not be a true one; it may have come to him through grown-ups who themselves see him through blinders—blinders that perhaps come from biases concerning certain ethnic or cultural

groups and that prevent his teachers or other members of his community from seeing him as he really is, as himself. He suggests ways in which we may help children to achieve greater self-respect as they learn about their own ethnic backgrounds and the part their people have played in building our country. He reminds us that only as children learn to like themselves can they reach out successfully into the world of school.

In these days—when cultural patterns are changing, when the tensions under which children must live and learn are mounting, when child is sometimes turned against child in anger or rejection, when children are often regimented into far too many "worthwhile" activities so that there is little time left for them to follow their own inclinations and interests—it becomes urgent for us to accept Ira Gordon's challenge and stop to think about how children feel. What are these pressures doing to many of our children? What about the picture of the self each one of these children is building? Is it one of self-confidence and self-respect, or have our expectations and pressures, our acceptance of some and not of others, harmed them so that already they see themselves as defeated and failures? Has the emphasis we have placed on cultural patterns of the past tended to alienate us and make us misunderstand the youth of today? We can find out from the children themselves if we keep the focus where it belongs—on the child and how he feels about himself.

Children's views of themselves

IRA J. GORDON

The role of self-estimates in behavior

Claire, a fifth-grader who reads on a second-grade level, was observed in social studies. On this day, Mr. Greene asked Claire to lower the blinds in preparation for a film-showing. She rose, shrugged her shoulders, and went over to the window; but she didn't do anything about lowering the blinds. Claire is usually the first to want to help the teacher. It is something she enjoys. Mr. Greene went over and showed her how to lower the blinds. Then he raised it again to let her try. He said to the class that it is important to learn how to do these practical things and that some day her mother may get blinds in her house. Claire appeared to be embarrassed (with fingers in her mouth and shy expression).

After the film, when Mr. Greene told everyone to "do their jobs," Claire went over and pulled the blind up but didn't let go. Mr. Greene said "Pull it" and she pulled, let go but looked as if she fully expected it to fall. The class laughed at her ineptness.

The discussion that followed was on the film. Each question directed at Claire was met with hands put over her face and her response if any was almost inaudible.

Mr. Greene is obviously concerned about Claire's feelings; however, his help was not too useful in this situation. Some understandings of the nature of children's views of themselves can help Mr. Greene, and other teachers and parents too, to solve the many behavioral problems they face each day.

All of us, not only Claire, have notions about ourselves, some vague and some well formed—who we are, how well we are doing, where we are "going." We also have feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that accompany these ideas. We see ourselves as able to fix things—and like the idea; or as unable to get anything to grow—and dislike this image. These views of ourselves play important roles in our behavior. They determine to a great extent what we try and what we avoid, what we see and what we ignore.

Let's examine more closely how these self-estimates influence the behavior of children by focusing on the children themselves.

Tim

Tim is a black, energetic seven-year-old. He feels the world is his oyster. He sees himself as able to "lick the world." Tim approaches school, teachers, adults, his "gang" and the whole

world with the expectation that all is going to go well. Sure, he might make mistakes; but so what, everyone does, so it's OK, it's nothing to worry about. Tim feels adequate, so he expects to find success in the things he does. He doesn't "hang back," but volunteers—to recite, to scrub the boards, to tell a story, to play a game. He has an over-all feeling that he's good—and he's able to take little failures in stride. They don't change his basic notion of his ability.

Tim's feeling of being able acts as a powerful force in his behavior. It enables him to reach out for experiences, it shields him from being thrown by minor failure, it gives him scope for growing. Children who feel adequate, like Tim, are not as influenced by failure or frustration as are those who have either an unfavorable or an unclear picture of themselves.

Anne

Anne has developed a different self-picture. In contrast to Tim's abiding faith in his ability, she feels there are just some things she can't do and can't learn to do. Reading is her chief burden. The school and her parents expect her, in fourth grade, to know how to read silently, to know how to figure out how to pronounce new words and know what they mean. All outside evidence suggests she's bright enough to learn. She comes from a "favored" home, one that provides her with books, travel experiences, and her own room for study. Her parents are well educated and expect her to go on to college. Intelligence tests show her to be capable. From the viewpoint of sociological research, the odds are in her favor. Her parents and teachers know this, so the pressure is on from all directions; she's bribed, cajoled, threatened and encouraged. Nothing seems to work. She just can't "get it." As Tim behaves in keeping with his self-picture, so does Anne. In this case, however, she acts to hang on to her self-notion of inability, painful though it may be to teacher and parent—and to Anne. It seems that once she's become convinced she can't, she behaves to keep it that way. She just can't see herself as able, in spite of all the "objective" evidence. She is an "underachiever" because of her view of self.

Thus, feelings of adequacy and inadequacy—of "can do" and "can't do"—play potent roles in determining the approach of children to experiences and to participation.

Juan

Juan, a gangling early adolescent, is concerned with other ideas. He feels alone, rejected, out of step and out of place. He feels that no one cares for him. He looks in the mirror and sees an ugly duckling, just emerging from childhood—and no glamour boy of screen or TV. He's a late maturer and not sure he'll ever catch

up to the other boys. He's thin and not very strong, and doesn't look too male yet. His father, who is the head of the household, expects him to show more strength, to stand up to the other boys, to have pride in his heritage. He's convinced not only that his folks don't understand him but also that no girl could possibly be interested in him. He wants to be loved—he's dissatisfied with his self-image; but nevertheless there it is—the hard, bitter truth as he sees it. Life just "ain't worth livin'." He's a square, or whatever word happens to be popular in his adolescent world for an outlander.

Juan views other people through his own eyes—when the Anglo gang laughs as he walks by, he assumes they are laughing at him; and he doesn't know if it's because of his physical immaturity, his Chicano background—or both. When Bill says a kind word on the playground, it must "really" be sarcasm; when his father asks him how things are going, he's pumping for information. Juan's perspective is distorted by his own rejection of himself.

Since he doesn't like this notion, he may be trying to change; but this is hard; he lacks skills and is inept. Failure leads to reinforcement of his present notion, and so the circle is closed.

Mary

Mary, like Tim, sees the world in bright colors. Her feelings are of comfort. She feels loved and sees most of her interpersonal relationships as rewarding. When she looks in the mirror, she can visualize a future beauty queen. At fifteen, she's sure all the boys are interested in her. She knows her folks love her; even when there are the usual adolescent-parent tiffs over limits, rights and responsibilities, she's sure, in their old-fashioned non-Aquarian age way, they are doing what they think is best. They can't help it if they just "don't know" the facts of modern life; but there is no question that they love her.

Mary treats people with warmth and kindness, with a positive "reaching-out" toward them, because she believes in the essential goodness of people. She expects warmth from others—and gives it to them.

Feelings about the nature of interpersonal relations, then, are also potent forces in behavior. Juan and Mary both construct an outside world that conforms to some degree with their own biases; both interpret other peoples' behavior toward them in terms of their own feelings toward themselves.

While these four children reflect basic attitudes people hold about themselves, they have been selected to represent the extremes. The intensity of feelings and the amount of feelings vary greatly from person to person. The chances are that very few

people see themselves as totally adequate or totally unloved or totally anything. They hold specific as well as general notions about themselves.

Children, as they develop, enlarge on their general concepts about themselves in connection with interpersonal relationships and achievement. They develop specific ideas that are tied up to particular people or pressures or situations. Anne sees herself not only as unable to read but also as unable to do other things —to do arithmetic, to get along with the girls. She also sees some other areas of weaknesses: she doesn't know how to talk to teachers and other adults, boys scare her, she approaches tests of any kind just loaded with anxiety. She has her strengths and is aware of these too. She feels that her parents really want to help her. She feels adequate in nonacademic pursuits, such as music and art.

Juan also is not without his positive views of himself. He knows he does well in academic work, he recognizes that teachers like him, he sees his kid brother imitating him and hero-worshipping him. But at his age these are not the important values. In the areas that count to him—paternal and peer acceptance and bodily development—he feels he is out of step and thus inadequate.

Any child's concepts of self are a mixture of many specific notions. These are usually somewhat in harmony with each other and they vary in importance to the child, depending upon his over-all view of himself. For example, Tim may fail a test and take it in stride because he's able to see that he didn't prepare for it; he felt it was going to be a snap and he got fooled. Anne may fail the same test and be crushed; it hits too close to home for her to be able to look at it objectively. It is further proof of her inadequacy.

Particular experiences, then, are interpreted by the child in relation to what *he* considers to be important. The more important a self-concept is to a child (such as ability to do school work), the harder it is to change and the more it affects and directs his behavior.

Since a child has several notions of self—for example, "I respect authority" and "I can't read well"—there are times when he is under stress because these two views collide. He may want to do well for the sake of parent or teacher approval but this is balanced by his feeling of lack of ability. His behavior may be a compromise—which may produce more strain; or the relative importance of these two ideas may make one dominate. This conflict of self-concepts can be seen clearly in the behavior of adolescents who are often torn between their concepts of rightness and wrongness and their concepts of being one of the gang, their

concepts of themselves as growing up and mature, their concepts of themselves as sons or daughters. In addition, bodily changes act to increase the lack of harmony and unity in their images of themselves.

Other Concepts

While concepts of comfort and ability are central ones in the personality of the child, each has many other concepts. Concepts about size, boyness or girlness, bigness and littleness, rightness and wrongness, ethnic rejection or pride, acceptance and awareness of social class, and just about every aspect of life are developing and affecting the behavior of youngsters.

These ideas are constantly being altered by experiences, but they also determine experiences. Tim, a few years earlier, because of his feeling of adequacy, may have tried to dress himself. Mother, wishing him to be independent, encouraged him and laughed with him over minor failures. She let him know she thought it was great to do for yourself. She constantly told him what a help he was when he acted big.

Juan's self-image about his body—his "ugly duckling appearance"—also contributes to his behavior. He shuns social events like the plague, lives in torment when school expectations force contacts with girls, doesn't try to get in on sports because he feels awkward, becomes a lone wolf because of his assumption of rejection of his appearance by others as well as by himself.

All children are measured by and measure themselves against both the culture at large and their family's own culture. Tim is doing well because he fits his mother's image of male, but he's bound to encounter those who will automatically see him as inadequate because he's black. Anne and Juan are in trouble because they are out of phase with both family and society—Anne in the academic area, Juan in the tough adolescent world of physical prowess and the family expectation of maleness. Mary's sense of self-esteem may help her through the conflict between her old-fashioned parents and what she sees as the new attitudes toward sex, drugs and alternative lifestyles.

Concepts Affect Behavior

The behavior of children, then, is greatly influenced by both their generalized and their specific notions about themselves. How *they* interpret the meaning of experience sets the stage for readiness for new situations. They seek out or reject people, they volunteer or withdraw, they develop skill or resist learning depending upon their concepts of who they are, how well they like themselves, and where they think they are going.

Why do these self-concepts loom so large as determinants of behavior? What is there about the nature of people that seems to be at work here? All of us have belonged to organizations and

committees. We know how these tend to keep th elves going —long after it seems they've finished serving any ful purpose. It's always easy to get a new committee appointed, but sometimes it seems next to impossible to abolish an old one. Organizations, by their very nature, have strong tendencies to keep themselves going, to resist change in direction. A person, too, is an organization—a highly complex organization of cells, tissues and organs. Like all organizations, the child attempts to develop along already established lines and to maintain himself without major changes. These concepts of self serve to a major degree as his guidelines for development. Behavior is the way a child has of developing and maintaining organization. He behaves in ways that enable him to develop as he has been developing and in ways that protect him from situations or experiences that would force him radically to change. Anne's inability to learn to read, particularly when she's under pressure to *do* so, can be seen as her way of defending and maintaining her already developed notions, even though to the outsider it would seem to be to her advantage to change. Tim's reaching out for new experiences can be understood as enhancing his self-image of capabilities. Juan's withdrawal from social contacts can be seen as useful to him, permitting him to defend himself from expected attacks. Mary, too, in establishing new peer relations, is acting to reinforce her positive image of self. In this way the behavior of the child can be seen as purposeful and useful to him, enabling him to develop and protect his own self. Even though his behavior may look to us as "defeating," it can be understood as useful to the child at his particular level of development—in respect to his own unique view of himself and his world.

Mr. Greene, Claire's teacher, can begin to understand Claire's behavior as goal directed, in keeping with the way Claire perceived herself and the class situation. This doesn't mean Claire's behavior or that of the four described above is rigid and unchanging.

Since the child is growing and is constantly being exposed to new experiences both from within and without his skin, his self is not static. It is constantly in the process of organizing, of taking in new ideas, feelings, attitudes and of adding these to the already developed personality. Self-concepts are not unchanging. They are affected by growth and experience. While they help the child to select and evaluate experiences, they are also being affected by experiences. They are influenced by all the forces acting upon the child, as well as being forces themselves.

The Role of the Family

Certainly, children are not born with any attitudes or value system. These are learned through time. Their original images of themselves are formed in the family circle. They develop these notions of who they are in relation to the behavior of the people around them, particularly through the ways in which their behavior is received by the adults who are important to them.

Perhaps the most important factor in determining whether or not a child will develop feelings of comfort about himself is the general climate of feeling that exists in the home. Long before the child is able to think out and reason about things, even before he is clear as to the physical boundaries of his own body, he is aware and sensitive to the feelings that exist all around him.

Since the child, in infancy, is not clear as to where he ends and the world begins—particularly his mother and other significant adults—he first experiences both self and world as one. Since he has no background of experience to lean on and to compare with present situations, his perceptions of the way he is treated loom large in affecting his concepts of self and world.

A major drive of the human body is to reach and maintain a state of balance. Periods of imbalance—hunger, pain, poor body position and the like—are periods of discomfort; while periods of fullness, warmth, being held and rocked are those of comfort. If the infant spends most of his waking hours being comfortable and if the responses to his cries of discomfort are fairly immediate, he begins to develop the notion that the world is a pretty good place and that he must be a fairly good person to be kept this comfortable. If, on the other hand, little is done to meet his needs, if long periods of discomfort persist despite all his efforts, then he begins to develop the feeling that the world is "not so hot," that he doesn't rate, and that he has little control over things. If opportunities are given to explore the world around him, handle objects that respond to his touch, have face-to-face transactions with family members that are fun, then these contribute to a positive view.

Time is important in the development of these concepts of comfort and control. Feelings are built up over a period of years and are not related spectacularly to single specific happenings. If, on the whole, day after day and month after month, the child experiences more comfort than discomfort, more balance than imbalance, more attention than lack of it, his feelings will be in the direction of seeing himself and the world on the "OK" side of the ledger.

As the child develops language and reaches out for more experiences, his needs for acceptance and love and warmth continue. As the cultural demands grow—the do's and don'ts increase, his needs for being sure of his place in the family also grow. By the third year of his life, as he reaches the stage of development where he is beginning to see himself as separate and distinct from others, his needs for support in his efforts to accomplish this are uppermost. His behavior—the so-called "negative stage"—can be viewed as attempts on his part at working on defining himself as apart from his parents. While this can be wearing on parents, it also can be seen as a necessary and vital step in the process of growing up. It is at this time that acceptance is so important because his behavior is harder to accept. Pressures from others outside the family increase. Their expectations that he conform are ever present, and people in the street no longer see him as "cute." The parents' acceptance of him as a unique individual, with rights and privileges, with needs of his own, is important at this time in helping maintain his image of his own worth and his favorable idea of self and world. He conceives of himself on the basis of the behavior of his caretakers toward him. They evaluate his behavior and he "takes over" and internalizes these evaluations, making them a part of him. His original self-concepts are the result of his interactions with his parents and the meanings he assigns to these experiences.

As the child continues to grow and develop, other crises will occur, such as the birth of younger brothers and sisters, the entrance into school, the first contacts with other values or prejudices, the beginnings of puberty. In all of these, the child builds upon the original foundations of love, warmth and acceptance laid down in infancy and early childhood. If those foundations have been well built, the chances are his self will be able to handle the sieges upon them by the pressure of events.

Favorable concepts of self in terms of feelings of comfort, in relation to expectations about how the world will treat him, are begun early in life and developed throughout life, resting on the base of warm, loving, acceptant behavior on the part of the parenting ones.

The foundations are also strengthened by the ways in which experiences are provided and interpreted. Acceptance is not synonymous with lack of order, limits or standards. Indeed, acceptance of the child at his own level really implies a recognition by the parent of certain limits. While the child needs to explore, this does not mean permission to run out into the street. Safety limits need to be set—on his person, on other people, on objects that are valued by the family. Acceptance means setting these in keeping with the level of growth and understanding of the child

and resetting these as he grows so that he can exercise greater and greater choice and greater self-control. Feelings of self-worth cannot grow unless experiences in self-discipline, appropriate to a child's level, are provided.

Love and acceptance include the total arrangement of family life which enables the child to have experiences that are warm and comforting and experiences with the social and physical world that are satisfying and challenging, yet safe.

Mary's present feelings of harmony with herself, her feelings that people will treat her in satisfying ways, are probably a product of the long-run home environment described above. She sees herself as a separate, unique and valuable person, expects others to treat her this way, and treats others with respect because she has grown up in a situation in which all the evidence of her experience says that this is so.

However, Juan has had so many experiences of rejection and lack of acceptance, both within and without the home, that he is sure the world is not a good place. He is also sure that he's not very deserving of better treatment. Since he cannot reason that the fault lies with the adults and peers around him, he is convinced that the handling he receives is a result of his own behavior. While he wishes, perhaps, to be liked, he doesn't believe that he has any real right to be liked.

The home experiences of Mary and Juan, while they lie behind them, affect their present behavior because they color the way these two teenagers look at their present-day world.

If we turn to Tim and Anne, we can see additional forces operating in the home to create and develop their concepts of self. Each family, in its own fashion, shows its children its standards and values, its expectations for them.

If we move back in time to birth, we can see this even in such things as wishing for a boy or a girl. Although most families are pleased with either, expectations about boyness or girlness, maleness or femaleness, are started early. Boys see demonstrated for them in the conduct of their fathers, in the choices of clothes and toys, in the acceptance of certain behaviors and the rejection of others, an implied standard in their homes for what it means to be a "good" boy. For girls, similar examples are provided. Along with the constant presentation of what is appropriate sex-role behavior, both boys and girls pick up the feelings of their parents and the people around them of the importance of being either male or female.

Feelings of adequacy are developed as another part of the total self-concept. The degree of agreement between the child's abilities and the standards of the home for achievement in man-

ual skills, language, athletics, motor skills, or conformity to adult demands greatly affects his concepts of his adequacy. If the boy is expected to catch a ball at age three and he can't, because by and large three-year-old boys can't catch balls too often, and if Dad shows that he's crushed by his son's inability, this helps to develop feelings of inadequacy. However, just as in the case of feelings and a sense of comfort, one single event does not hold the key. The accumulation of experiences of seeing Dad crushed, of feeling you can't do what is expected (even though the expectation to an outsider may appear unreasonable), does the trick. In a like manner, being able to live up to what his parents expect and receiving many evidences that they approve of what he can do, even though the achievement by itself may not look like much to others, helps the child develop feelings of self-worth and adequacy.

In both cases, it is not so much the achievement in and of itself that is important: it is *how* this is received by the adults. As the child grows, he is able to do some evaluation for himself. For example, when working on a jig-saw puzzle, Tim knew whether or not he got all the pieces in the right place. If he didn't, he may have felt that here was something he couldn't do. Tim's mother, however, may have shown him that no one expected him to be able to solve that puzzle as yet. He did as well as could be expected. Tim learned that he could accept that some things were still beyond his reach, and this posed no threat to him. Anne, on the other hand, may have received no such reassurances when her behavior in front of adults was inadequate. When she refused to go to bed without a squabble when there was company, no one showed her that, while she had to go to bed, this didn't mean that she was a "bad" girl or inadequate socially. It just meant that she hadn't yet reached the point of being able to go to bed when it was so interesting to stay up. No one should have expected her to do so. The idea that she had "let her folks down" creeps into the picture and, when added to a weight of other evidence, leads her to the concept that she just can't do the right thing in front of adults.

The evaluation of the child's behavior, its acceptance or nonacceptance, may then be seen as the crucial factor in determining attitudes of adequacy in dealing with the world.

Bodily Forces

We have seen how the sex of the child and the family's behavior in reference to this contribute to concepts of boyness or girlness.

Other bodily forces contribute also to the development of concepts of self. Again, these must be seen as long-run forces constantly in interaction with family standards and climate of feeling. For example, Tim is an early maturer. His body is growing and

changing sooner than what might be considered the "average." This is a bodily process, over which neither he nor his parents have any control. It's "just one of those things": each child goes through the growth pattern at his own rate. Tim happens to be on the fast side. However, because of the kind of neighborhood and school environment in which Tim lives, early maturity for a boy operates decidedly in his favor. It wins him applause when he's able to do things with his legs and hands sooner. In school he was able to take care of dressing himself and thus won the approval of the overworked kindergarten teacher. In first grade he was able to learn to read and write in manuscript because his body was ready for these experiences. A great many other boys his age were expected to do the same things but were not ready for them. Since Tim was able to meet these standards, his sense of adequacy was increased by the approval of other adults outside his home.

Anne, however, is not so well coordinated nor is she an early maturer. While girls on the average are ahead of boys, she lags behind her group. Again, as a physical fact this is not something for which she should be considered "bad." But, in her family, in her school, and in her neighborhood, performances are judged on an age level. Little if any account is given to all the other factors at work. She may have developed her notions of herself as a nonreader because she saw herself failing compared to the other girls in school and no one explained to her that some children are able to read sooner, not because they are smarter, but simply because their bodies have grown faster than hers. Her parents may not have understood this, either, and "fussed" at her because she was in school and not reading.

The rate of growth of a child's body, particularly when our society sets so many age-graded standards, can have effects upon the development of concepts of self in the area of adequacy. Body size, strength, body build and energy all play roles in the formation of attitudes toward self. A boy like Juan, for example, is caught up in the adolescent world where athletic skill and physique mean so much. Mary, more fortunate than he, is able to meet the standards of the girls around her and finds her notions of herself increased by her gang's values in terms of appearance.

School Influences

In looking at the physical forces that affect self-concept, we have also discussed school and age-mate expectations and standards.

As children move away from strong family influences and turn to outside adults and more strongly to the "other kids," new experiences are provided for them that either serve to reinforce or to alter their present notions of self. It's easier for them to interpret what happens to them as reinforcing their ideas; it's harder for them to change.

They go to school, expecting to find that teachers will view them as their parents and neighbors did. They go to school with various behavior patterns already in operation—ways of attacking or withdrawing, ways of seeking out or rejecting people, ways of working on new problems. All these have been developed to keep the present set of attitudes and values intact and to keep the child moving in the direction he has already taken.

However, his total self is still quite plastic, still quite open to change; and, on the whole, the range of his experiences has been narrow compared to what will open up for him in school. Attitudes toward self, particularly those about abilities, are very much related to what happens in school. Claire's teacher, for example, reinforced her negative image by making a public display, although he was trying to be helpful. Further, his reference to her home could easily be seen by Claire (and her classmates) as a put-down of both home and females.

The school also provides so many new experiences for which the child has developed no particular or specific concepts, such as: time schedules and routines, eating in the cafeteria, being with a large group of children the same age, expectations of sharing, taking turns, using books and other materials and so on throughout the day. The family is no longer present to "screen" the child; he must come to grips with the school way of life all by himself. While teacher and mother may confer, the child has his own private experiences and perceptions of school. If he is not clear about what to expect, each situation will have more effect upon him and will enable him to develop new concepts.

Since school is often the first place the child has daily contacts with cultures other than his own, it is a vital force in influencing a child's acceptance of his family's way of life. Juan, for example, found that Spanish was frowned upon when he entered school; his younger brother, now entering first grade, may be in a bilingual program in which Juan's father is on the policy council. Seeing father in a potent role will contribute not only to this child's self-esteem, but Juan may also feel a necessary sense of pride which can feed into his general view of self and world.

Peer Influences

When youngsters reach the preadolescent years, the importance of adults as shapers of attitudes diminishes. What one's own "gang" or age-mates think of him assumes increasing significance. Since youth are moving during these years toward independence from adults and since they are not yet mature enough to really be on their own, they use their groups as sources of strength to them in working through their new relations with adults. These groups also serve as places where exploratory

needs can be met, where information can be gleaned, where ideas and skills can be tested. Belonging to such a group offers much in the eyes of the preadolescent.

To a great degree, these groups stress adequacy as a prime requisite for membership. For boys this is defined in terms of athletic skill, strength, daring; for girls in terms of a sense of humor, good looks, clothes, friendliness.

Concepts of self are developed or reaffirmed in the efforts to gain a place in a group and in the attempts to achieve some degree of recognition from peers. Tim has found, for example, that his willingness to plunge into things is valued by the other youngsters who are just beginning to shift their focus from adult to child. Mary's poise and self-assurance, her ability to reach out toward others are reinforced by the status she gains in her group. Juan, who feels he lacks those qualities desired by the other boys, retreats from peer activities and thus loses out on the chance to acquire any skills. His behavior is an example of the circular relationship that exists among all these forces: because he doesn't feel adequate and because he is awkward, he has no status with his peers and thus withdraws; because he withdraws, he loses opportunities for learning that might make him adequate; because he loses such opportunities, he reinforces his concepts of inadequacy and isolation.

Peers can help in developing many positive self-concepts. Many a youngster who lacks the skills that adults value is able to achieve in those areas of life which peers value—such as strength and daring. Very often team sports can and serve to give some boys a sense of adequacy which it has not been possible for them to develop in the academic setting. In high school and college, varsity athletics may serve as the ladder by which self-esteem is developed in those who, because of ethnic or economic background, have been unable to do in the strictly academic realm. Peer support during the teens is powerful force in relation to adequacy concepts.

Societal Influences

Children today live in a world of television and constant exposure to the world outside the home. Their views of self are shaped by world events, as well as by family affairs. For example, magazine ads still fail to portray black males as heads of households, holding normal jobs, as other than athlete or musician. Chiquita Banana and Frito Bandito are unacceptable caricatures. Tonto is the only good Indian. There are few favorable images of any ethnic group other than northern European (predominantly British) and the main role of the Scandinavian is as a coffee pusher (Mrs. Olson). The richness of cultural plurality, which enhances a child's pride in his identity—whether religious or racial or na-

tionality—is missing both from the commercial media and the texts.

The child learns from the news, and the discussion of it in the home, what it means to be a Jew, an Irish Catholic, an Italian, a black in our society and our world. The Jewish child gets a lift when the Soviet Union is forced to modify its stance toward emigration; the black child feels a sense of pride when African nations stand up to Rhodesia and South Africa; the Irish child is torn by events in Ulster. All of these events are outside the control of family or teacher, but what they do with them—in explaining and interpreting—modifies self-acceptance and esteem.

Attitudes toward others is a part of self, and how the family and school present images of others will greatly influence the child's view. If those on welfare are seen as shiftless and lazy, if ethnic groups are stereotyped, if occupational groups are derided (the used car salesman and the politician as least trustworthy), then as the child comes into contact with children from these groups, he will tend to behave toward them in terms of such categories and will find change hard.

Self-Concepts Are Constantly Forming

As we have implied, the self is not a static thing somewhere inside the body. Youngsters' ideas of themselves are in a constant state of evolution, with new ideas taking the place of old as new experiences take place and as the body itself grows and matures. Any single, specific concept is not formed by a single event; it is the result of the mixing of all the forces: physical, environmental and psychological. Generally, there is a degree of agreement among an individual's notions and his behavior is in keeping with them. Although there is a resistance to change of direction, changes in general ideas of comfort and ability are possible all during the growing years. The early years are of vital importance in setting the general direction. School and peer experiences act to supplement the original concepts. Since these experiences offer a wide variety of new situations and values, they may serve to help youngsters increase their estimates of their own worth. Which way these forces will go depends upon the individual child and the particular people with whom he comes in contact. The world of each child is to some degree unique. It needs to be approached in that manner.

How adults can estimate children's self-concepts

Since each child is unique, parents, teachers, counselors and others who work with children and youth need to find ways to look at and interpret individual behavior. While to some degree it is safe to say that "all adolescents do . . ." or "all preschoolers do . . .," this does not necessarily apply to Tim or Anne or Mary or Juan in the particular way in which they behave. It does not strike at the main problems that concern the adult. These problems are to understand why these behaviors take place and how to provide an environment that leads to positive growth.

Behavior can be viewed as a language. It is a way a child has of telling us what's "on his mind," what is important to him and what is bothering him. If we are willing to look at a youngster's behavior in such a way and listen to his "language," there are many cues and tips that he offers us which aid in understanding him.

Tasks Tackled or Avoided

Youngsters invest their time and energy in engaging in those activities which they consider important—those which are in keeping with their views of self and world. They also invest considerable energy in getting out of or avoiding those situations which they see either as unimportant and unrelated to them or which pose threats to them. One way in which the adult can observe this is by attempting to keep track of those activities and behaviors which seem to take place over and over again. What is it that just seems to come up all the time? The chances are that these behaviors have special significance for the youngster.

On the other hand, what activities do we see going on all around the child, activities in which other children of his age and general background are engaged, in which he consistently displays little or no interest? Chances are that this is active avoidance, an indication of a "danger zone" to the child. It may also be an indication that he is working so hard to accomplish other, preliminary goals before he's ready to take on these, before he sees these as important.

What are the things that Tim's parents and teachers might notice as they watch him through a period of time? They would see that lots of activities are muscular; he always seems to be doing something with his body. Either he's bike riding with a group, playing tag or chase games, or just running for the sheer joy of movement. He's always ready, at the drop of a hat, to play and climb and work off steam. They would also notice that he has his quiet periods—when he builds complicated structures with his

blocks, when he listens to and tries to accompany music, when he seems to be concentrating very hard on drawing, painting or writing. At times he's so absorbed in what he's doing that he doesn't even seem to hear them when they call. At other times he's asking all kinds of questions—many which are related to nature and science. He's interested in knowing why things act as they do, at a different level than the "why stage" of the three-year-old. They notice that he's doing things with Dad around the house, taking over more and more of Dad's mannerisms, becoming more and more boyish and less childish in behavior.

They rarely see him cleaning up after himself or cleaning up himself. This may be a "sore point" between mother and son. He's always intent on racing out to play. Being clean and neat and tidy just doesn't rate with him; it is viewed as sissyish. He spends rather little time with girls, except to chase them, and is much more interested in boys. Mom has also noticed that he squirms out of reach now when she attempts to hold him or show any affection toward him. This is just beginning, but he seems a little at a loss . . . he doesn't want to hurt her, but after all . . .

In all these ways, Tim is telling us how he sees himself—as adequate, as male, as growing up.

Anne's parents see a different pattern. Of course, Anne is older and she's a girl. But the differences are individual as well as age and sex ones. She spends the bulk of her time "palling around" with the girls—huddling, laughing and giggling. It seems that she's always fussing with her appearance, trying clothes on, straightening things up.

Unlike some of the other girls in her class, she shows rather little interest in the boys. She likes to dance, but not social dancing. She avoids adult contacts as much as she can. If possible, she stays out of sight when company is at the house. When the family decides to visit, she has all kinds of angles for staying home—schoolwork, girl friends or even stomach-aches. Her parents never catch her reading, even though her friends are getting involved in movie magazines and romantic novels. She finds out all about movie, TV and recording stars through conversation, not through reading. Her parents are thus able to guess at how she sees herself—where she feels weak and strong.

In school her teacher notices other patterns of behavior which reveal her self. While hands wave violently volunteering answers, Anne's is down. When projects or committee work is being planned, Anne doesn't participate. She chooses to do art work rather than library research, pictorial reporting rather than oral reporting. She's often the last one in the room and the first one out. She rarely initiates conversations with the teacher but is polite, although monosyllabic, when the teacher speaks to her.

Juan's activities also provide clues for understanding him. What does he do with himself? Juan's time, on examination, is taken up with himself. His parents do not see him in company with others; he brings no one home and seems not to be invited anywhere. He's home a good deal of the time after school: watching TV, reading, or just "moping around" the house. He spends lots of time in the bathroom looking in the mirror, studying his face, combing his hair. If Mary's parents were to get together with Juan's, they would agree on how much time goes into outward appearance. When Juan does go out, it's to a movie or maybe as a spectator to some sports event where he can lose himself in the stands. To his parents it looks like a lonely life, and it is. Dates and dances seem not to exist for him; he doesn't participate in sports; he never talks about friends or the "other kids." He's telling his parents how he feels. His behavior demonstrates his self-image of inadequacy and awkwardness, rejection and apathy.

Juan's behavior at school demonstrates another facet of his self. He is still a "loner," he shows up on sociograms as a fringer or isolate. He uses the library effectively, although sometimes as a retreat. His homework is always done and he volunteers for individual assignments. Sometimes he clowns, calling attention to himself by highly energetic activity but then, after he "sizes up" the reaction, he retreats to his individual role.

Mary's parents hardly ever see her. It seems she views home as a place to eat (prodigiously), to sleep (sparingly), to hang her hat. Her slogan, like that of many a football team, appears to be "go, go, go!" She's dating—with the gang or occasionally with just one boy for a period of time—movies, joy riding. When she's not with a mixed crowd, she's talking and visiting with the girls, either in face-to-face conversations or long hours over the phone. Much of her time is spent in preparing for these activities: fussing before the mirror, debating with herself over what clothes to wear, primping and hair combing, finding out what others are planning to wear. All this may add up to a final appearance that shocks her parents—her hair is not their idea of neat, her clothes look to them as castoff work clothes, and—where's her bra? They worry over whether pot has replaced coke at those house parties she's so mysterious about describing. Her evasiveness puzzles and annoys them.

In her fashion, Mary is telling them that she sees herself as adult but is not quite sure of this; but she sees herself struggling to achieve independence and that she also has the need to be dependent upon them and other adults; that she sees the world as an exciting, vital place and is sure she is well liked by the important people—the boys and girls of her gang. On the whole, she presents to them the picture of an adolescent who feels loved and accepted and is finding her way in the teenage world.

Evidences of Tension—Child's Techniques for Handling

We have mentioned "avoidance" as an active behavior of the child that may indicate to us either an area in which he feels tension or as an experience for which he sees little need and is not quite ready. Children have many such ways of letting us know how they feel, and how deep they feel about themselves and the world around them. The ways they use are for self-defense and are necessary to them. No child lacks ways of handling his feelings, and most children use a variety of ways. What are some of the processes that children and youth use to protect themselves?

Denial

A favorite method for handling tense situations and experiences is to deny their very existence. All of us on occasion have found that we just can't recall having done or said something; all of us have "overlooked" or just not heard what someone else has said. When Tim says, "I never heard you call," or, as often happens in school when a test is given, "We never had this!" it does not mean that he is willfully lying or malingering. It means that he actually may not have been aware of what was said.

Denying takes two forms: forgetting something that has happened or not being aware of a present experience. In either case, from the child's point of view it serves the useful function of keeping his self intact with the least amount of tension or anxiety. When we see this taking place we can judge what events are difficult for Tim to deal with "out in the open" or what events are so unimportant, so far removed from his interests, goals and values that he just is not aware of their existence. Only by watching this and the other devices he uses, as well as by looking at the tasks he tackles, can we decide which it is for a particular child.

For example, in the school that both Juan and Mary attend, posters and bulletins abound, announcing dances, parties, socials and a variety of extracurricular activities. Mary sees all these and gets the facts straight. Juan is hardly aware of their presence. What each one sees depends upon their views of who they are. Experiences are "denied" on the same basis.

Distortion

Another way of defending is to distort or misinterpret what is happening or has happened. We're all familiar with Aesop's fable of the fox and the grapes, in which the fox distorted the importance of the grapes to him when he failed to get them. Using "sour grapes" is a typical example of this form of defense.

Shifting the blame is another popular example. Tim, in a fight on the playground, does this when asked why he started it. He says Billy started it and then says, "Well, he wudda if I'd let him." Juan shifts the source of his troubles with the others to their dislike for him. Anne blames teachers and parents—says

they're "unfair," always "picking on her." Mary, when she's stayed out later than the agreed upon time, shifts the fault to "the gang." No matter what, it's always the "other guy" who's the cause, never one's self.

Distortion can take place in other ways as well as those above. Anne may belittle the efforts of others as a way of inflating her own sense of achievement.

Sometimes a whole group or a member of a whole group is singled out for blame-placing. "Scapegoating" is a distorted way of seeing things. In this case evil is blamed on the weak, on the one who has the least ability to fight back, on the one who can be seen as different because of physical, cultural or psychological factors. Since the real cause of tension can't be faced, the blame is shifted to a person or group with little power to fight back and then may be followed by a variety of aggressive techniques. Juan may serve as such a scapegoat for his age-mates, because they recognize him as different.

Basically, the child erects a "perceptual barrier" around his self. Events and experiences which confirm his already developed self or which are "new" readily gain admittance. Others are denied or distorted. The *meaning* of the event is changed. Juan cannot deny he has no friends; but he can assign a personal meaning to this fact—a meaning that enables him to protect himself. Anne cannot ignore the fact that her parents think she is more capable than she feels herself to be, but she can interpret their behavior in keeping with her needs to maintain her self.

Without this perceptual barrier, the self is wide open, with nothing to protect it. The barrier is normal, natural and essential for survival. The acute observer, seeing where the barrier is erected, can infer the self-image which the child is attempting to preserve.

Occasionally this perceptual barrier breaks down. The child faces an experience for which he has developed no defenses. Feelings become open rather than stay revealed. In young children, this occurs more often simply because they have not yet developed their repertoire of defense devices. They still have both an incomplete view of self and an incomplete shield. One way in which children react when their defenses are inadequate is with open aggression.

Aggression

Sometimes frustration or tension is met by direct attack. In this case, direct attack does not solve what is creating the tension but takes the form of direct release of the feeling, which makes the problem easier to "take."

Such direct aggression may be physical—hitting, shoving, pushing, biting, tripping, kicking. It may be verbal—derogatory

expressions, curse words, profanity, threats. In either case, they are directed at the person or persons who are seen by the child as the causes of his distress. A preschooler may call a parent "stinky" or threaten to "put you in jail." A very young child just beginning to talk may say, "Kick Mommy! Kick Daddy!" Older children may be more subtle and have different words at their command, but the intent is the same—to show anger in a directed fashion.

While some of the ways that children and youth use may shock parents or teachers and may be considered as not socially acceptable, they still must be seen and understood as methods for showing the legitimate feelings children have. While ways may be found to do this in more appropriate fashion, the basic underlying right and need of the child to experience anger and to let people know how he feels must be respected and met.

Aggression may be object directed, although this may be a less satisfying and more primitive way of meeting the issue. Slamming doors and throwing things may be seen as two examples of this aggression coming to a boil. Again adults, while not necessarily condoning such behavior, can understand it as supplying them with insights into what troubles their child. On the basis of these insights, ways can then be found to aid the child's development.

The nature and direction of open expression of aggression are also functions of age. We would expect second-grader Tim to be more prone to go all out, to get angry and to direct this anger at himself. Being a real boy, there are times when Tim is hurt or upset or frustrated. He tends to deal immediately with the situation, because he can perceive his experience fairly realistically; but he still has his "bad days."

The particular patterns of displaying anger are functions of a combination of factors. The initial meaning of the situation is related to the self-concept; the means used to display this meaning are related to age, sex and what the particular home, community and peer cultures have taught are acceptable. The adult should be more concerned with *why* the child feels the need to express than with the particular technique he uses. The child is telling us that he perceives the situation as threatening and that he is not equipped to handle it. Only as the situation becomes more comfortable can he afford to let his guard down, widen what he will see, and find ways to actually solve the problem. Unfortunately, aggression is often met with counter-aggression, because aggression threatens the self-image of the parent or the teacher. It is viewed as a lack of "respect for authority" on the part of the child. When this occurs, neither child nor adult can reduce his tensions and see solutions. Explosion usually results, and neither learns to either understand the other or to solve the situation which created the need for aggression in the first place.

Only as the adult learns to accept aggression as being "reasonable" in the child's eyes, so that he is not threatened by it, can he learn to provide a climate of feeling in which the child can learn to see himself and the situation and deal with the issue at hand.

Peer Behavior

Much of the child's time in school is essentially directed and concerned with the experiences and materials we adults provide. The child's world, however, especially beginning in the preadolescent years, is less oriented toward adult expectations and more closely related to peers. Sociometric studies have shown that children's choices of friends are related to their personality structures. We might then ask ourselves: With whom does the child play? What roles does he take in relation to his playmates? How are these roles perceived by others?

We would expect Tim to play more with boys than girls, to choose youngsters his own age or older in preference to younger ones, and to choose those boys who prefer the high energy types of activities. In organized games on the playground, we might expect to find him in the thick of things. For example, Tim's teacher wrote the following report:

Mrs. Young said, "Today the girls are going to be against the boys." The class yelled, "Oh boy!" "Wow!" Tim clapped his hands and laughed. Then Mrs. Young said, "All right, let's get in line and follow what I do." The class lined up and did the things Mrs. Young did as they went outside to the playground. They clapped their hands in the air, ran, skipped and crawled to the playground. Once there, the children formed a circle and Tim, three girls and two boys ran around the outside of the circle with the girls after the boys. Tim tripped and fell laughing as he rolled on the grass but he got back to his place without anyone catching him. Mr. House, who was outside, took the boys to one side and Mrs. Young took the girls to another. Tim and the other boys screamed, jumped, skipped or ran after Mr. House who yelled, "We're ready," after a conference with the boys. The boys then ran en masse to the girls who in turn ran en masse to the boys trying to catch them. The girls caught two boys. Tim ran out of one girl's grip and got away. The girls ran over to the boys' side, Tim stood with his hands on his hips while Mrs. Young conferred with the girls. Then the boys ran after the girls but they didn't catch any. The class came together in a sort of circle; Tim pulled Jack aside and whispered something to him; then they both jumped and laughed. Mrs. Young took the girls to the side and Mr. House separated the boys into teams for football. Tim had one football and Joe another. The boys ran to the edge of the playground and back while the rest of the boys cheered and yelled, "Come on Tim!" "Come on!" Tim won and Jack and another boy took the football and ran for their teams.

Peer behavior exists in the classroom as well as on the play field. It's much harder to perceive because the situation is less free, but discussion and pupil-teacher planning sessions are revealing. Some key questions the teacher might ask are: Does the child offer information, opinions, suggestions to the group?

If so, what is the nature of the ideas? Does the child seek information? What kind? Does the child attempt to help other classmates by listening, commenting upon previous speakers, clarifying ideas when the need arises? Does the child talk more frequently or less frequently than might be expected? Are the comments he makes relevant to the issues?

Summary

The adult looking at the behavior of the child can estimate the child's self-concepts. He should ask himself two questions as a way of beginning to see the child as the child sees himself. First, how must the child be perceiving himself and his situation at the moment that causes him to believe this behavior is right? Second, how must he feel about himself? Of course, this leads not to a single guess as to the perception of the child but to many possible inferences. These "pile up" over the course of time and can be sifted as the adult learns more of the behavior. Through the process, then, of observing, guessing what the behavior means to the child, observing some more, refining the guesses, the adult can emerge with a very good estimate of how Tim, Anne, Juan or Mary sees herself or himself. Using this process Mr. Greene, the teacher who was puzzled about Claire's behavior, can understand why she performs so poorly in class.

Knowing how the child perceives himself is, of course, only part of the story. Teachers and parents both see their roles as enabling children to grow to be the most adequate people possible for them. Understanding the perceptions of the child should not imply that laissez-faire is the best teaching approach. Knowing that the perceptions are changeable but that at the moment they serve a purpose for the child presents a fascinating challenge to the teacher. There's lots of difference between understanding and accepting that Anne feels inadequate in reading and arithmetic and letting this crippling feeling persist. How can Claire be helped to see herself differently? How can Tim's teacher help him to continue to see himself adequately? What can be done to assist Anne to modify her view of self as incapable? How can Juan learn that life *is* worthwhile?

It would be foolish to suggest that there is any magic formula or simple panacea. Even such obvious words as "love" and "acceptance" and "empathy" are really quite complex processes in which the teacher's self becomes inextricably interwoven into the relationship between teacher and child. Instead of presenting commandments and injunctions, a list of "thou shalts" and "thou shalt nots," the attempt here will be to approach the topic through operations and behaviors of teachers and parents. Concepts are learned originally in an interpersonal, evaluating setting. Concepts can be modified in similar settings. Then what *can* adults do?

Be Yourself—Be Honest

Adults have needs, frustrations, hopes and aspirations, too. Adults have selves which they are enhancing and defending. Adult behavior reflects the self, too. Teachers often try to live by other people's concepts of what teachers should do and how they should behave. This clash of concepts creates conflicts within the teacher. He is torn between doing what he perceives as "right" and what he believes the administration or the community expects of him. Parents are also caught in this situation. Mother has feelings of what she should do, but she feels the weight of both the trained "experts" and the untrained, self-styled neighborhood "experts" peering over her shoulder. In both cases the behavior of the adult may not reflect the true feeling of the person, but a façade, a mask that has been donned because of a perception that "this is what I ought to be." In the classroom, the sweet, "loving" tone of voice may hide a real feeling of annoyance. The teacher may be unhappy with the behavior of a child. A warm climate does not, however, mean a false cli-

mate. Teachers and parents need to be able to express how they feel, both positively and negatively, rather than express a concept of what they *ought* to feel.

This is important for several reasons. First, if the teacher feels displeased or unhappy with the child's behavior and communicates to him only this sweet, sticky, false "love," the teacher is being emotionally dishonest. If the child's perceptions are not too distorted, he will recognize this and know that something "isn't right." He will not be able, however, to gain a realistic view of self in such a situation. He doesn't learn to modify his behavior, although he may be puzzled and confused by the patently false response he is receiving. Second, the teacher feels guilty, because somewhere within him he knows that his behavior does *not* reflect accurately his belief. He becomes even more "on edge." This can lead to more tension, so that the whole class begins to sense the brittleness and rigidity of the classroom atmosphere. The children, in turn, cannot be themselves, resulting in a marionette-like classroom. Third, the teacher who *does* let the children know his honest views should *not* feel guilty about this. He should not feel that he is a "bad" teacher because he's just had to stop Tim from monopolizing the group, tell Anne that she is late in turning in her work, or stop more serious misbehaviors of children in his room. He needs to feel that limits *are* a part of loving and that children are *more* comfortable in a setting they recognize as "real." Fourth, behaving in keeping with one's feelings is an indication of health, according to some of our latest research. Children develop concepts of inadequacy and distorted perceptions of self and world when their behavior and feelings have become isolated from each other. When Tim feels angry and we tell him he shouldn't, we are teaching him to be unhealthy. He needs to learn that both love and anger are natural but that there are appropriate ways in which to express these.

Of course, if *all* the teacher feels falls into a negative frame, then being himself can be harmful to his class. The solution does not lie in his attempts to "cover up" his feelings but in his efforts to understand his own needs to see life in such angry and frustrating terms.

The parent needs to look at his own values, his own hopes for the child. He needs to recognize that just as he prizes his individuality and seeks for "understanding," so does his child. He has to clarify for himself where he ends and his child begins, the same way in which the child in infancy had to discover his bodily limits.

The teacher has to solve the problems of his own relationship to authority, his own feelings of achievement, his own concepts of his role and the role of subject matter in the development of the child. Does he see intellectualism as more important than

other values? Does he comprehend that the children are *not* "his" and that he cannot "play God"? Can he deal with the feelings that occasionally beset him when he has not "done wonders" for a particular child?

In effect, the adult must differentiate himself from the child and then perceive himself realistically as an essential phase of aiding the child.

Set Realistic Expectations

Naturally, it would not be wise to consider the above idea without its counterpart: the need for knowing about children. Being honest with the child and with oneself requires knowledge about the capabilities and limitations of childhood.

If the teacher recognizes the wide spread in maturity in the room, he doesn't expect all children to read on the same page at the same time. He often allows for this in reading but then proceeds to forget it in other skill areas such as spelling and arithmetic. As he gains skill, he realizes however that "grade level" is a vague and perhaps mythical standard; and he then provides for Tim to move ahead and in depth on his own.

In aiding the child who feels inadequate, such as Anne, he knows that realistic expectations for her must be set where she sees herself. This is what she *can* do, not what parents and teachers believe. He gives her tasks that are at this point or slightly higher, but he doesn't concern himself with "fourth-grade work." He knows that Anne sees herself as capable in music and art, so he attempts to capitalize on this. He finds books about these subjects that she can read, or he writes his own material. He can even use the "experience chart" device of the first-grade teacher, letting Anne create her own descriptions of her art work or what a particular song says to her.

Realistic expectations are double headed: (1) they must be in keeping with the work a child can do; (2) they must be in keeping with the child's concept of self.

Provide for Productive and Creative Work

Not only art and music can be used to enable the child to expand his horizon and express his self. Drama, poetry and compositions are also fruitful.

Role-playing is a particularly useful tool for enabling children to perceive themselves and their relationships with others in new ways. By "acting out" family-like situations in which Anne plays her mother and someone else becomes Anne, she can see what life looks like to her mother. She can begin to comprehend the way her parents feel about success, and she can also see the way another child responds to this. A well-equipped kindergarten or primary room offers ample opportunities for free role-playing

situations. A doll corner or playhouse is often used by the children as a setting for imaginative play. For instance, an observer wrote:

Jane and two little boys, Pete and Hal, are in the playhouse area. Pete is in the cradle and Hal is washing dishes. Jane runs over to Pete in the cradle and, bending over, begins slapping his legs. He "cries." Then she runs to the telephone and talks into it. She has one hand on hip and shakes her head back and forth. She looks at Pete, who has his feet out of the bed. She puts the telephone receiver down with a bang, runs over to the cradle, slaps Pete all over. "No, I want you to lay down! Lay down! Lay down!" She turns to Hal: "Now you let my baby alone."

Hal: "Why, I'm the father."

Jane: "No, you're the brother-in-law. We already have the father chosen." (To Pete) "Hey, that's my bed, O.K.? Now, get out of my bed."

Writing about oneself has been used many times and might be overworked as an approach. If we recall that the child is *always* revealing himself, we can let him write imaginatively, creating his own topics. Even in the first grade, children can write evaluative statements about themselves. For example, a teacher found the following on her desk one day after she had reprimanded Bill for not listening during a reading group session: "I want to be a betr readr and a betr lisnr and i want to be a betr coloring."

A sixth-grader, with poor coordination but good intelligence, wrote this composition on "School Days":

"4th grade first part of year in Mrs. Lewis room starting to—learn something how to write and hold a pencel then the latter part of the year I was transferred into a young teachers room Miss Smith. She had a rough time with, a guy named Johnny he didn't know or do anything while I was in Miss Smiths room I learned nothing.

"5th grade knowing nothing from following year had a tough time tring to chach up with the class would not chach up becauce I cound't hold the pencel right and it took me a long time to finesh the kids had no time for me you might say. Didn't learn much in grade 5 eather.

"6th grade didn't know to much when I came in I found out that the kids were real nice during the past year I feel I have learned much."

Some children cannot let themselves go in such a fashion. For Tim it would be easy, although he'd need much help in writing and spelling. Anne would experience some trouble with this, unless she knew she *could* write it in her own words. Juan, adequate in academic work, might write a play which could be produced by his classmates. It would enable him not only to use and develop his talents but to gain much-needed status in the eyes of his peers.

Providing for creative work demands much flexibility on the part of the teacher. He must set a stage that enables each child to see his own work as good. He must not use a single standard of measurement, but see this work as developmental for each child.

The product can be used as additional information about the self of the child. It serves two purposes: providing opportunities for personal growth and evaluation of self and furnishing data on children's self to the teacher.

Provide a Variety of Stimuli

Classrooms can be exciting places, in which many learning activities are occurring simultaneously. We read of modern school plants with "corners" or "materials centers" for science, esthetics, language arts, etc. The mere existence of such places in the classroom on the architect's plans does not mean they will be used creatively. If materials are static, the "corner" becomes a closet for storage. Somebody once described a good library as one in which all the books were in and in their place. Such a definition is the opposite of our concept.

Children should be able to select materials covering a wide range of difficulty. Again, the "grade level" concept should be eliminated. In Anne's room, materials should range from second through sixth grade. If there is a library in the school, junior high level work should be available. No child should be told he can't go on in a particular area of work because it belongs in the next grade.

Science materials should transcend the biological and include both homemade and manufactured materials. Tim's teacher, for example, has done a great deal of work on magnetism, while Anne's class has built many devices for weather forecasting. In both cases, not all children were involved, nor need all children be involved.

We've learned that concepts grow through experience, that experience is not simply contact with an object but reflection and thought about it, particularly thought which relates it to personal goals. The more varied the child's experiences, the more opportunities for development of concepts of adequacy and security.

Further, the provision of materials at varying levels of difficulty can help remove the "stigma" of "being behind" that can very easily become operative in a classroom built around grade-level expectation, in which individual differences are perceived as a difficulty which must be overcome as the teacher attempts to make the children more alike.

Acceptance of not only the fact that children differ but the right of children to *remain* different will aid the teacher to plan for flexible use of materials in his room so that each child feels challenged to learn along with being valued as a person.

Trust Children

A complementary idea to the one above is that children can be trusted to use time wisely when opportunities allow them to do

so. So often, afraid that they will "waste time," we have seen our role as policemen rather than aides in the learning process.

This should not be taken to mean either that the teacher says, day in and day out, "Now class, what should we do today?" or adopts a laissez-faire approach in which there is no direction or help given. Trusting the children means involving them in planning at the level of their ability and within limits which should be clearly established. It means true *planning with them* rather than the *manipulation of them* which so often passes for pupil-teacher planning. If the child learns in keeping with his self and his perceptions, trusting the child means *listening* to him, so that the teacher can learn what his perceptions are. If all behavior is goal directed and children are seeking to enhance themselves, trusting them means the belief that they do not wish to waste time, that they will actively and enthusiastically engage in tasks which hold meaning for them, and that they will react positively to real choices.

Trusting means a recognition that learning is a personal, private affair and that the teacher doesn't have to be hovering over the child every second. In some classes, when the teacher walks out of the room there is chaos; in others, he is scarcely missed. What makes the difference? It seems to be the factors discussed above plus this basic trust.

Trust implies increasing both freedom and responsibility in the classroom. Tim's teacher knows he can allow Tim to work "on his own," but Anne's teacher is concerned that Anne's feelings of inadequacy will block her attempts to do individual work. If Anne develops the feeling, through many experiences, that the teacher does believe she can function this way, if the task is clear and perceived by Anne as being within her capabilities, if Anne sees the task as useful to her and in keeping with her goals, she will be able to achieve. As she does so, she becomes more able to modify her concepts of her adequacy; she becomes able not only to work without constant supervision but also able to participate in planning. The beginnings of trusting children begin at home long before they even attend a nursery school. While the amount of supervision and guidance changes with age, the basic principle remains constant. The three-year-old needs to feel trusted, within the limits of his capabilities, just as much as the ten-year-old. Of course, in the preschool he needs a safe environment so that exploration can be productive and not harmful. But his motivations and urges to grow, to explore, to find out "why" and "how" need to be trusted and encouraged, rather than curtailed and limited.

If the teacher can perceive that his feelings about the trust displayed in him are no different from children's feelings, he can see the tremendous role this plays in enabling children to grow.

He knows how frustrated and blocked he is when nobody trusts him to do his job; children feel the same way.

It requires a skilled and perceptive teacher to develop flexible programing in the classroom. But, most of all, it requires feelings of adequacy on the part of the teacher, a belief that what he is doing is right, a willingness to try. Mistakes can and will be made in judgment; but if the children know (and they are quick to sense this) that the teacher is working to help them, these mistakes can be used to learn from and will harm neither the classroom atmosphere nor the children.

Provide for Immediate Feedback

One principle which is fairly well established in learning is that the sooner the child receives evidence of the effectiveness of his response, the faster and better he will learn. The longer the delay between the child's behavior and the teacher's response, the less the effectiveness of the learning situation. Knowing the child's self-concept and seeking to enable the child to develop feelings of adequacy, the teacher must be ever alert to the child's behavior. When the child makes adequate responses, in any situation, he gets two kinds of feedback: (1) his own evaluation and (2) the evaluations of others, including the teacher's. If he receives immediate recognition that his behavior *is* appropriate and good and if this recognition is given in such a way that he perceives it as enhancing aspects of his self, then this experience can be incorporated into his self. The teacher need not "beat the drum" and shout "Hallelujah!" but he can communicate his awareness in many subtle ways. A simple word, a nod, a glance, a smile may suffice. Much communication, we know, is nonverbal.

Displaying samples of *all* children's work in the room, selecting something of which each child is proud, is another way of providing "feedback." In more formal teaching or testing situations, providing right answers and discussion to clarify materials serve as well.

Enhancing Cultural Respect

In our pluralistic society, it is essential that adults teach children about the contributions that each culture has made and is making to the country: by modeling in their own behavior, by involvement of parents, by curriculum units, field trips, use of media. A bilingual education is not just for Juan—but also for Mary and Anne and Tim. A knowledge of black history is not just for Tim, but for all the children. In turn, Tim and Juan need to see and understand that there are many white cultures, as well as red and Oriental, all of which have many positive elements. Children, as well as adults, tend to see the differences within their own group, but to see others as all alike. Basic to the fullest sense of self-esteem is a growing esteem for others.

Going to school together, learning together, discussing and arguing and playing together, finding out about each other, are perhaps the best ways to enhance both pride in one's own background and respect for others. It does not mean a loss of identity in a common mix, but the rediscovery of identity along with relatedness. The teacher needs to realize that children may not always like each other, but that they cannot understand each other if they never meet.

Handling "Discipline"

Occasionally a child's behavior in the classroom transgresses the social norm, violates the rules so flagrantly that the teacher feels he must "do something." Unfortunately, this is usually what is meant by discipline—punishment for "bad" behavior. Actually all the ideas mentioned above are related to discipline if we conceive of it as enabling children to govern their own behavior in ways which are good for them and for society.

The need for limits has been mentioned before, but we might take a look at it from the angle of "discipline." *First,* the limits must be clear. It must be obvious to the class just where the teacher stands and what his expectations are. There can be little effective learning in an unclear situation. *Second,* the more the class can design its own code of conduct within the limits, the more chance that all will adhere. *Third,* the limits should be realistic; that is, they should be in keeping with the knowledge of human growth and development. *Fourth,* the teacher should expect that both the limits and the code of conduct are subject to review as the class develops.

How should limits be enforced? We know that punishment accomplishes little. It does not teach children the fundamental lesson of self-evaluation and self-control. It imposes external controls. The best way to enforce limits is through the provision of satisfying, stimulating, exciting learning situations within them, at the same time communicating basic trust.

The ideas mentioned under "feedback" also apply here. Communicating to the child that he's doing well, at the time he's doing it, is far more effective than zeroing in on his "misbehavior."

There will still be the child who transgresses. The teacher needs to stop his behavior, but this is not sufficient. The child needs help. He is communicating, remember, how he sees himself and the situation. The teacher needs to help the child explore how he felt and why he perceived his behavior as appropriate. The first act merely stops the behavior, the second enables the child to modify his perceptions without threat.

There are children who still are not helped by such efforts on the teacher's part. The teacher must recognize his limitations and

refer these youngsters to other agencies either within or without the school. Sending the child to the principal is *not* referral to such an agency! Youngsters who misbehave can be most troublesome in a classroom and do not have the right to destroy a good learning situation for their peers. What they need are other types of learning situations—not rejection, sarcasm or corporal punishment.

Positive discipline implies a recognition that the child's feelings must be respected. He has the right to feel good or bad, the right to feel frustrated or triumphant. Just as the teacher's feelings need to be communicated honestly, so do the child's. A healthy classroom situation provides numerous outlets for the expression of feeling. As children find out that they can use these ways of expression, the needs to transgress become fewer and fewer.

Many "discipline" situations can be avoided if the teacher asks himself whether or not a certain experience is *really* necessary for a child. Must all children paint in the kindergarten? Must all children learn to dance in large groups? Allowing children the right to set their own limit on participation in such experiences, rather than making an issue of it, can be the better solution. There is a difference between providing an opportunity for a child to have an experience and forcing him to do something that he sees little need or point to do. Sometimes, permitting a child to "sit back" for a while acts to free him in other ways. He may, in his own good time, even volunteer to paint or dance.

This is equally true of group and committee work. Some youngsters are interested in special aspects of a problem; but the teacher has previously decided that he will have six groups of five or five groups of six children, and poor Juan is "steered" either gently or otherwise into a group. Why not let him work by himself on his phase of the work, as long as he can relate his research to the work of the class? Both he and the class can profit, and another "discipline problem" has been avoided in favor of a better learning situation.

Another aspect of the problem occurs in the first few weeks of school if the teacher has just inherited his class from a fairly authoritarian, traditional teacher. The children's first tendencies will be to "test the limits" for all they are worth. If the teacher can maintain them in the face of fears of loss of "respect," if he can persevere, he will find that the "bubbling over" will soon reach a peak and subside. He knows this is the expected outcome in change from an autocratic to a democratic situation.

Discipline, then, permeates the total classroom situation. It is not synonymous with taking action in emergency. It needs to be built upon the recognition of the urge of children to develop, recognition of the uniqueness of the child and his needs for self-evaluation and self-control.

Building Home-School Relationships

We have seen that the initial and most crucial concepts of self were developed in the home setting during infancy and early childhood. By the time the child gets to school he already has defined basic attitudes toward himself in terms of security and adequacy. Home-school communication becomes an essential if the teacher is to understand the self of the child. This needs to be a two-way street, in which the teacher conveys an *honest* picture of his perceptions of the child and sees the parent as a partner in aiding the child. The parent, in turn, conveys to the teacher information he feels might be of use.

Communication between home and school should rest on the premise of partnership. The child's basic learning center, especially for attitudes toward self and others, is the home. The child's motivation to learn and his basic skills are learned at home. There needs to be, therefore, several types of parental involvement. *First*, communication between home and school should be centered upon the child's behavior and learning. This communication requires that each accept and respect the other, that the teacher doesn't feel defensive about what he is doing in his class and doesn't make the parent feel defensive about what he is doing at home. Information about the behavior of the child, couched in straightforward, nonevaluative terms, can serve as the initial content of conferences or home visits. As each begins to understand the other, suggestions can become mutual.

The teacher should not attempt to "sugar-coat" the interview, leaving the parent with a false impression about the child's work in school. Neither should the teacher see the conference as an opportunity to gripe and present only the negative.

Such interviews or conferences or home visits should become standard, so that parents don't feel "singled out" and don't feel that their child is in trouble. Home-school communication can aid *all* children. Some parents boast that "they've never been called to school from kindergarten through high school." What a waste! Their child may never have been in difficulty, but some potentialities he may have had may not have been realized.

The essence of effective communication means, first, there should be a system that makes conferencing a part of the normal procedure. Second, an atmosphere of mutual trust and recognition of separate areas of responsibility needs to be established. Third, communication should be honest.

Second, the home-school relationship can be strengthened by encouraging parents to come to school, to observe, ask questions, work in the classroom, volunteer. This type of involvement means that principals need to see that parents are their final assessors, and that the school truly belongs to them. It does not

mean parents should be confined to menial tasks—they know many things and can teach much to the class. *Third*, parents should be encouraged to get involved in whatever decision-making groups exist in the community. Head Start, Follow Through, and Title I require such groups, but there is no reason to confine them to special federal programs. When parents become involved in the affairs of the building, they not only become more supportive of the professionals but also their children are able to see them move from a sense of alienation, frustration and powerlessness to a renewed sense of personal worth. All parents need to feel this, for themselves as well as for their children.

Strong home-school relationships, respecting the special competencies of teachers and parents, bringing into focus the common goals for the child within the diversities of culture, provide the child with the type of general learning environment that enhances not only his achievement but also his concept of himself.

Use Your Own Initiative

Reading back over this whole section, one might very well say, "That's all well and good, but exactly how do I do all this?" The tendency to seek for recipes, to adopt a "cookbook" approach, is within all of us. It would be so nice, sometimes, if somebody would give us the technique, the gimmick, the device to use in each situation. Fortunately for our concepts of the dignity and worth of the individual, such pat solutions for working with individual children do not exist. We can use major guiding principles, we can provide what we know to be a good setting for learning. but we must each work out our own salvation in our own classrooms.

This section began with the principle of being oneself. It ends on the same note. Each of us has some creativity; the teaching situation offers ample opportunity for our development as well as the development of the children. As we learn to know *their* selves, and our own selves, the way to make their world a healthy one will occur to us. We will not be afraid to experiment because this is, to a great extent, our job. If the teacher can adopt the point of view of "action research," of trying new ideas out in his own classroom and carefully evaluating the results, he will find ways to help each child to see himself as adequate, to assess himself realistically, and to view life and learning as an exciting challenge.

Suggested readings

Bronfenbrenner, U. *Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and USSR.* New York: Russell Sage, 1970. This work of Bronfenbrenner's reveals the emphasis on character development in Soviet schools, and indicates the need for reinvolving the American family in bringing up its children.

Erikson, E. *Childhood and Society.* New York: Norton, (2d ed.) 1963. A classic text by now, Erikson's discussion of the growth of the ego, including the eight stages of man, provides rich insights into childhood and adulthood.

Glasser, W. *Schools Without Failure.* New York: Harper & Row, 1969. In this book, Glasser stresses involvement, relevance and thinking and offers teachers practical ways to modify negative self-images.

Gordon, I. J. *Studying the Child in School.* New York: John Wiley, 1966. Ways to observe and evaluate the affective and cognitive development of children, along with procedures for self-evaluation of the classroom, are offered in this book.

———. *Human Development: From Birth to Adolescence.* New York: Harper & Row, (22d ed.) 1969. Written from a transactional viewpoint, the book integrates the biological aspects of development with the social world and the child's own views.

Murphy, G. *Human Potentialities.* New York: Basic Books, 1958. Gardner Murphy has the great skill of lifting one's vision and pointing out what man can become. This is an inspiring as well as highly informative book.

Prescott, D. A. *The Child in the Educative Process.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957. This definitive work on the child study program that originated under Prescott's chairmanship at Chicago contains not only a complete description of the processes used in understanding children but also a philosophical orientation and a thought-provoking chapter on changing the educative process.

Purkey, W. *Self-concept and School Achievement.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970. Purkey presents a review of the educational literature showing the relationship between self-concept and academic performance.

Stone, L. J., & J. Church. *Childhood and Adolescence.* New York: McGraw-Hill, (2d ed.) 1968. Perhaps the first child development book written with concern for the child's perceptions. A well-written, easily read book, containing many ideas on nursery and elementary education.

Selected ACEI Publications

Aides to Teachers and Children. Identifies aides and their activities. 1968. 64 pp. $1.50.

Children and Drugs. Factors that have caused drug abuse to surface in younger children. Guidelines for the teacher who suspects a child is using drugs. Ways of working with children and their parents that could eradicate the need for drug-taking. 1972. 64 pp. $2.50.

Children and International Education. 1972 reprint. Two new leaflets added, bringing the total to ten. Portfolio. $1.75.

Children of Resurrection City. Hope for poverty's children as seen by a child psychiatrist and a Head Start teacher. 1970. 48 pp. $1.50.

Feelings and Learning. Five educators discuss how feelings are interwoven into many areas of children's development. 1968. 118 photos. Hardcover book. 96 pp. $5.95.

Kindergarten Portfolio. 1970 revision. Includes 14 leaflets on the child, the teacher, the principal, the program, the environment. Bibliography. $1.50.

Lag, To Sit, Oz, and Much More, A. Helps for Day Care Workers. Twenty authors. All reprints from CHILDHOOD EDUCATION. 1971. 96 pp. $2.

Learning To Live as Neighbors. Reprint articles from CHILDHOOD EDUCATION. Guidance to teachers and others educating for understanding. 1972. 96 pp. $2.75.

Migrant Children: Their Education. Talks of migrant children's needs; looks at inservice teacher training. 1971. 64 pp. $2.

Nursery School Portfolio. 1968 revision. 16 leaflets by educators on curriculum, teacher role, evaluation. $1.50.

Primary School Portfolio. 1968 revision. Twelve leaflets on the sixes to nines. Curriculum, independent work, creative experiences. $1.25.

Readings from CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: Articles of Lasting Value. Eighty articles from first 40 years of CHILDHOOD EDUCATION. 1968. Paperback book. 416 pp. $3.75.

That All Children May Learn We Must Learn: Looking Forward to Teaching. Twenty articles from CHILDHOOD EDUCATION. Help to those looking forward to teaching. 1971. 96 pp. $2.

Transitions: Years Middle, School Portfolio. 1969 revision. Educators write 14 leaflets. Grouping, citizenship, trends in subject areas. $1.25.

When Children Move. 1972 revision. Discusses effects moving has on children. Gives ideas to teachers and parents to help ease child's period of adjustment. 48 pp. $1.50.

Young Deprived Children and Their Educational Needs. Discusses environmental factors shaping children's lives, experiences. 1967. 16 pp. 50¢ ea., 5 copies $2.

These publications may be ordered directly from
Association for Childhood Education International
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016

A complete publications list with membership information will be sent upon request. (Orders amounting to less than $5 cannot be billed. Include check or money order payable to ACEI; stamps not accepted.)