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ABSTRACT

Research is reviewed that concerns citizenship education for primary grade children, and strategies are discussed that deal with political socialization in early childhood years. The most current methods for teaching citizenship emphasize complacency and compliance to school rules, not the understanding of democratic processes and citizen responsibility. Administrators may perceive compliance as practical and necessary, but it fosters naive political inactivity when students grow older. Basing his conclusions on the work of Piaget, the author calls for mutual respect, reciprocity, and obligation between teachers and students. Such an exchange leads toward the democratic process of social interchange. Interviews with primary grade children indicate that children are attuned to political aspects of their milieu and that they can accept rules as reasoned actions which support a degree of freedom for all group members. Law in a Free Society, a California-based project, is described. It is an elementary and secondary level program with exemplary curriculum, teacher training, and evaluation components. (AV)

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# Another Specie Endangered: The Young American Citizen. Thoughts and Comments on the Political and Legal Education of Primary School Children

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Recent commentators on American education have stimulated debate and controversy dealing with overt issues of school administration, teaching competencies and the academic/vocational content of the curriculum. These discussions reflect the complexity of current thought and suggest a growing need to shift the focus of concern to a more fundamental level that reexamines the society-centered role of the school and it's historic purpose in educating students in the American political system.

Indicative of this concern are the ambitious and innovative curricular activities emerging in the citizenship education field, particularly in programs designed for secondary and middle school students. The Special Committee on Youth Education for Citizenship of The American Bar Association lists these projects in a useful Directory of Law-Related Educational Activities. However, research and implementation of planned learning experiences in programs for young children is minimal. The consequences of this neglect are less evident in these crucial formative years of five through eight than they are in later years of adolescence when general illiteracy about basic legal and political concepts and peer support for anti-social behavior become matters of serious public concern.

Astute observers of other political systems have written of the intense efforts made to convey the ideals of those systems to the young at the earliest social entry point. Their efforts are dramatic in contrast to ours, an orientation often characterized as neutral education. While this neutrality may represent a rejection of the indoctrinating tactics of the past, in actuality it provides for the continuing support of conformity, submission and non-democratic behaviors.

Continued avoidance of the issues surrounding education for citizenship, rationalizing that the young are not yet ready to deal with political concepts, is unjust to the child, unrealistic for our democratic society, and, given

the research that is available, unsoundly based.

We need a new approach in the educational comments

toward understanding the processes and values of our democratic institutions,

toward understanding our rights and responsibilities as individual citizens and as members of democratic groups,

toward expanding our concept of freedom under law in a democratic society,

toward planning school experiences that are congruent with democratic process and encourage social commitment.

The essential thrust of this article is toward gaining (1) perspective on the research and literature relevant to preparing young children for citizenship; and then, moving beyond this awareness, (2) to strategies that reflect our social philosophy, strategies that deal with primary political socialization in the formative early childhood years. The paper is explicitly concerned with primary aged children, though obviously there are parallels and implications to be drawn for all school aged children.

In reviewing the literature, and as background for their interesting study, Children in the Political System, authors Easton and Dennis were driven to the disturbing discovery "that childhood has been thought of as a political vacuum probably only because to this day so little attention has been given to the specifically political aspects of the socializing process during that period." Despite the widely held belief that political learning is non-existent during childhood, or if present, trivial in consequence, the research of these authors demonstrates that political experiences are inescapable determinants from the very earliest stages of childhood.

Authors Hess and Torney found that previous research indicating the effectiveness of the family in transmitting political attitudes and behavior has been overestimated. Their research, reported in The Development of Political

Attitudes in Children supports the view that "The school apparently plays the largest part in teaching attitudes, conceptions, and beliefs about the operation of the political system." In their landmark, large-scale study of elementary aged children, these authors found that teachers often discourage democratic participation as part of the learning process. They also found that teachers tend to avoid the realities of political life while emphasizing compliance and authority. They concluded, "Compliance to rules and authorities is a major focus of civic education in elementary schools." Their study also included ratings of teachers' perceptions of the importance of various topics, and here they determined that the strongest emphasis was placed on compliance to law, authority, and school regulations.

From their observations, it appears that current methods for teaching citizenship do not encourage an understanding of the processes and values of our democratic institutions, or of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a constitutional democracy. Rather, citizenship education is a euphemism for teaching complacency and compliance to the rules and standards of conduct of classroom and school, behaviors that are better suited to an authoritarian system.

Combined with the political reticence of teachers and school administrators these schooling experiences may well account for political inactivity and the failure to grow beyound early naive levels of loyalty and attachment to the nation to a deeper level of commitment and participation.

Often, the emphasis on compliance is preceived as practical and necessary. Control is an issue in elementary classrooms and easily becomes a preoccupation of the teacher and school administrator. Compliance and conformity become modes of control, with relatively little if any recognition of the student's right, even at an early age, to participate in classroom or school governance. Ironically, young children virtually always study the governance of their own communities without ever questioning the governance process and experiencing

participatory governance in their own schools and classrooms.

In Political Education and School Organization, Willis Hawley cites the teacher, especially in elementary school, as the person who establishes the culture of the clasroom. There is substantial evidence, according to Hawley, "that most teachers give support to student behavior which is conformist, subordinate, nonassertive and well-mannered (by the teacher's standards), and that they tend to oppose independence, creativity, initiative, self-reliance and intellectual skepticism." Hawley observes that, "To the child the teacher usually stands as the personification of public authority. If students find that teachers make arbitrary use of their authority, they may come to expect that persons in authority should not be trusted, or, perhaps worse, that the irresponsible use of power, although not desirable, is to be expected and tolerated."

Seymour Sarason studied how the norms and rules that govern behavior are formulated in elementary schools. Sarason refers to the area of norms and rules as "constitutional issues" and he concludes that not only do teachers unilaterally determine the class constitution, but the issue of their authority is never raised. He found that teachers just assume that:

1. Teacher knows best.
2. Children cannot participate constructively in the development of a class constitution.
3. Children want and expect the teacher to determine the rules of the game.
4. Children are not interested in constitutional issues.
5. Children should be governed by what a teacher thinks is right or wrong, but a teacher should not be governed by what children think is right or wrong.
6. The ethics of adults are obiously different from and superior to the

ethics of children.

7. Children should not be given responsibility for something they cannot handle or for which they are not accountable.
8. If constitutional issues were handled differently, chaos might result.

Hassled by the complex pressures and demands of schooling, teachers find it difficult to imagine alternatives to their authoritarian behaviors. Often they lack the support system for behavioral change, the tolerance of school administrators and community for the trial of new ways of interacting. And yet, the stop is an essential one toward building a context for learning about democracy in the classroom.

In "The Right to Education in The Present World," an essay of major importance, Piaget images for us an alternative to the false assumptions and sterility that characterize the path of unilateral, authoritarian decision-making. Piaget theorizes that the child has three spontaneous emotional tendencies. The first two are a need for love, and, a feeling of fear of those who are bigger and stronger. Unilateral, authoritarian adult behavior is an interplay between these two tendencies - behaviorally stressing the child's needs and fears, enforcing dependency. Piaget expands our insight by suggesting that when the adult expresses a feeling of respect toward the young child, the child merges the first two emotions into a third, the feeling of obligation, an inner acceptance of rules engendered by the child's response to the person whom he respects, "one who is the object of both affection and fear at the same time and not only one of these two emotional states." Gradually, the child is thus able to move beyond dependence and the concommitant rebellion it inspires to independence and reciprocal relationships characterized by mutual respect, cooperation and growing self-discipline.

According to Piaget, "Education, founded on authority and only unilateral respect, has the same handicaps from the ethical standpoint as from the intellectual

standpoint as from the intellectual standpoint. Instead of leading the individual to work out the rules and the discipline that will obligate him or to work with others to alter them, it imposes a system of ready-made and immediately categorical imperatives on him."

In essence, the educational significance of mutual respect combined with methods based on the spontaneous social organization of children is, to further quote Piaget, "to permit them (children) to work out a discipline where the necessity is discovered in action itself, instead of being received ready-made before being able to be understood." And also, "to lead the child to construct for himself the tools that will transform him from the inside - that is, in a real sense and not only on the surface."

By resorting to mutual respect instead of authority, to reciprocity and obligation, and not external obedience and conformism we move closer, more fully toward the democratic process of social interchange. This is indeed a significant alternative for teachers. And what of the child and his perceptions?

In my own informal Piagetian-type interviews with children, I questioned what six's and seven year olds thought about rules, whether they knew how to find out what the rules were, what their perceptions were about the reasoned need for rules. I also questioned their attitudes regarding the fairness of rules and the consequences of not knowing the rules.

I met with the children in small groups of four or five. I was impressed with their interest and curiosity in our topic. Their feelings and perceptions lend weight to our understanding the significance of this area in their lives.

Responses in these interviews indicate that children did recognize some rules as sensible and protective. One child commented, "They tell you what to do, or not." Several of the children expressed difficulty in understanding the "can do" part of a rule, for example, "The line in the road is so you don't cross over." In fact, the line also tells what you can do, but children seem

to have difficulty with that. Comments made by the children suggest that the child wants to know the rule and is often fearful of expressing his need to know. They seemed unaware of the purpose of many of the signs and symbols that codify and order their environment.

The children talked about how scary and frightening it was when they were new in a class, or, simply, when the teacher was "mean" and they did not understand a rule or felt the rule was unfair, difficult to keep, hard to achieve. They tended to suggest that the more authoritarian teacher did indeed heighten their sense of anxiety. There were also indications that the Piagetian social milieu of mutuality, (as suggested by the warm, positive teacher-children interaction) provided more reasoned responses that recognized the protective and helpful dimension of rules.

As educators, we must deepen our concern for these children, who, guided by realistic needs for love, and feeling fear, conform to an illusive "good" behavior, adjust to a benevolent tyranny or, resisting indoctrination, risk alienation in their incipient struggle for legitimate rights and privileges.

As we broaden our research base and attend more systemmatically to the specifically political aspects of the formative social milieu of the classroom, our rigid and categorical notions of the child's limitations in this area will become evident. Instead of formulating that the child is inextricably bound to experience rules as a punishing response to his quest for freedom, we will recognize, in a more balanced context, that the child is attuned to the political aspects of his milieu, and that the child has the capacity to recognize and accept limits and rules as reasoned actions that support a degree of freedom for himself and for all members of the group.

A vigorous and exemplary effort to confront this critical frontier has been made by a California-based project, Law in A Free Society. The project has been funded by the California Council on Criminal Justice and the Law

Enforcement Assistance Administration and is currently operating under a grant from The National Endowment for the Humanities. The six year development and diffusion project is planned for elementary and secondary students and teachers. It is designed to encourage informed understanding and support for the fundamental values, principles, and processes of constitutional democracy. The curricular framework includes an exemplary in-service teacher education model, guidelines and student resources for the entire kindergarten-secondary range, and an evaluation component to measure the effectiveness of the program. The guidelines and classroom materials are organized around basic law concepts of authority, justice, diversity, participation, freedom, property and privacy, and integrate process oriented teaching strategies with substance derived from the fields of political science, law and psychology. To achieve the objectives of this program, teachers and other school personnel are brought together in cooperative involvement with members of bar associations, law enforcement agencies and political and social scientists. This new collaboration is unquestionably a great strength of the design and reports of program impact in pilot projects throughout the State of California reenforce this view. When development of the project is complete, each basic concept will be packaged as instructional modules and will include film strips, student casebooks and teacher manuals. Meanwhile, preview of the the in-progress filmstrips for "Authority" suggest that these fanciful, well-conceived classroom materials will be welcome by teachers as well as students.

Curricular approaches such as just outlined are encouraging and provide us with a new and promising perspective for citizenship education.

However, as the research reported in this article indicates, our conventional understanding of the specifically political aspects of primary socialization are both limited and distorted. Further research linking political socialization and child development is critically needed in this relatively uncharted area.

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