

The authors believe that children are achieving anonymity because of circumstances in the home and organizational patterns of the school. It is suggested that educators follow four key elements in setting up the school for instruction and learning. Two major recommendations are offered to help alleviate the lack of discipline and stability in the child's world at home and at school.

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The Child No One Knows

A man is bound to be parochial in his practice — to give his life, and if necessary his death, for the place where he has his roots. But his thinking should be cosmopolitan and detached. He should be able to criticize what he reveres and loves.

Eric Hoffer

Who knows this child? Anyone? There was a time when this question could have been answered with certainty: "Parents and teachers." Not too many years ago the vast majority of children enjoyed close association with parents, teachers, as well as other adult members of the community. However, children today are more apt to achieve anonymity within home and school settings than ever before.

Anonymity in the Home. We believe one contributing cause of the anonymity of children is that parents are relinquishing children during the early years to the care of custodial institutions such as day care centres and nursery schools. While the reasons for day care are varied, the fact is that many working parents are using the services of these institutions.

Children of modern families often face the prospect of living with only one parent due largely to an increasing divorce rate. The number of one-parent families increased by 40 percent between 1960 and 1973, and over one half of that increase took place after 1970. In a schoolroom of 25 students, the teacher can expect that approximately two children will be from such families. If those 25 children are black, the number will be 10.¹ The authors feel that even these figures might be conservative, based on personal observations in many schoolrooms. Since the number of yearly divorces has increased by over 130 percent since 1960, the one-parent family is a rather common phenomenon especially among upper and middle income groups. In most cases, the father is the missing member in these single-parent family groupings and the trend promises to continue.²

Children of one-parent families are often relegated to the day care centre or nursery school because the financial circumstances of the parent left with the care and upbringing of the child are such that working full-time more often

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¹Gloria Smith and Alice Scales, "The One-Parent Child and the Classroom Teacher," *Today's Education*, 64 (1975), 83-86.

²Smith and Scales.

than not, is a necessity. Due to the fact that the parent works and the child is at a day care centre, this parent is not in a position to spend a great deal of time in assisting his or her children toward positive social/emotional growth.

Furthermore, financial considerations are often cited as the cause of children being sent to day care institutions from two-parent families. Again, these children are not provided with parent models deemed necessary for social growth. Therefore, the day care centre and the school are often solicited to provide support in these aspects of the child's life. More than half of the children placed in day care/nursery institutions come from one-parent families.³ Yet, the evidence overwhelmingly points to the manifold benefits which accrue to children who grow and develop in a stable, secure two-parent family situation. This is dramatically born out in materials developed by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, "Developmental Characteristics of Children and Youth" (1975). Social development is recognized as one of the four major areas of a child's total development.⁴ Some contributions parents can make to their children's growth and development are cited below:

- 1) Parents provide sex role models for their children.
- 2) Parental attitudes are a primary source of the child's self-concept.
- 3) Parent direction is important for the child's physical safety.
- 4) The child learns family expectations in regard to control of aggressive behavior, achievements, and degree of independence.
- 5) The child learns to express caring behavior toward others.
- 6) The child learns to become interested in and to carry out small chores or tasks around the home.
- 7) The child learns to follow directions and rules.
- 8) The child tests the limits set by parents.
- 9) The child learns to have strong feelings for family and home.
- 10) Parents are influential in providing support and guidance in school achievement.
- 11) Parents assist in helping the child assume personal and social responsibility.

It should be pointed out that many day care institutions are aware of meeting the social/emotional needs of the children with whom they work, and do so in commendable fashion. In this role, day care staff serve as surrogate parents. Whether or not the surrogate parent can be proven to be effective in making contributions to children's social/emotional growth is not the point. The fact is that this cultural pattern is taking place.

Anonymity in the School. Although, circumstances may prevent parents from being able to fulfill all of their responsibilities toward contributing to the positive social growth of their children, this ought not be true in the case of professional educators. During the school year, chances are that the child will be taught by many teachers, none ever knowing the student in any depth. Since educators have placed a high value on student achievement, they have organized the school day into many fragments where children move from teacher to teacher

³"Dilemma For Working Mothers: Not Enough Day Care Centers," *U.S. News and World Report*, 80 (1976), 49-50.

⁴The three other major areas are: 1) Physical Development; 2) Development of the Self; and, 3) Intellectual and Language Development.

in order to concentrate teaching/learning activities into efficient components. For example Saxville lists numerous factors affecting "instructional programming" (scheduling) of high school students with a rationale of promoting teaching efficiency.⁵ Of the 41 factors listed which influence the organization of the school day, only four of them are student-oriented — none have anything to do with the social or emotional growth of students! The same reasoning is often used for elementary school organization for younger children.

Important to the social growth of children, yet often overlooked, are the values teachers hold, displayed through their behavior, and the influence these values have on the social/emotional growth of children. If the school chooses to compartmentalize learning through a departmental organization, the opportunities for children to gain from significant and continuing adult leadership is diluted. Since many schools are organized in a fashion which focuses on imparting knowledge based upon efficiency or convenience for the adult professionals, they do not support or take into account important factors in a child's social growth.

A case in point is Jack,⁶ a child from a broken home who has had a history of social adjustment difficulties each year that he has been in school. Jack is nine years old and in the third grade. Every day he is dropped off at school before 8:00 for a free breakfast program. By 8:30 he has already been supervised or taught by four different adults — three teachers and the bus driver. By 10:00 Jack has completed his math class with a fourth teacher and has moved to reading class with a fifth. Before the day is over, Jack has moved through a total of 11 different school settings with six different teachers responsible for his instruction. Again the question is asked: "Who knows this child?" Unfortunately, Jack's case does not seem to be atypical.

Comments and attitudes expressed by Jack's teachers range from "I would like to have Jack with me all day," to "I would really rather not have anything to do with Jack." The authors surmise that the school through its organization for instruction is working directly against harmonious relationships between teachers and students. Rather, it should organize to cause the development of long-lasting and intense adult-child relationships which are necessary to promote positive social development.

It should be pointed out that there are educators who speak of the folly of the school trying to do everything for all children. Palmer, in summarizing research in the area of school effect on values and attitudes of children writes, "The consistent trend of the research also indicates that schools cannot operate independently of . . . family background and social context and that the omnipotent power of the schools often accepted as part of the educational stereotype in our society does not exist."⁷

Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the authors that schools and elementary classroom teachers should establish a first priority: that of developing a positive social order. Thelan states, "Given a group of students and a teacher in a classroom, some sort of social order, classroom culture, and climate is bound to develop."⁸ Rather than let this social order develop unthinkingly as many teachers and schools seem to do, the social order should be developed to counteract the anonymity and disruption of children.

⁵Anthony Saxville, "Programming Advice for the School Schedule," *The Clearing House*, 48, No. 9 (May, 1974), 547-551.

⁶B. McNair and R. Goldenberg, "Jack: A Case Study of School Induced Problems in Social Adjustment," (Unpublished Manuscript), The University of Georgia, 1976.

⁷John Palmer, "Education and Research, Examination of a Stereotype," *The Clearing House*, 48, No. 9 (May, 1974), 544-546.

Establishing a Social Order. There are at least four dimensions which a teacher needs to consider to establish a classroom social order conducive to the positive social/emotional growth and development of children. These four dimensions are:

I. A Sense of Belonging to the Community. A teacher needs to create a classroom (community) atmosphere in which each child feels important as a member. Each child helps the social milieu of the classroom by being a contributing member and in believing that it is a good place in which to be. No privileged person or group exists in this community. Glasser maintains that the child's need for love and self-worth are intertwined, and the child finds his identity fulfilling these needs through participating in classroom activities. "Teachers and children learn to care enough to help one another with many social and educational problems in school."⁹

II. A Sense of Responsibility to the Community. Each child needs to feel responsible for the behavior of the members of the community. Not only are each child's actions important in making the community a good place, but the child feels that he is helping others to see that their behavior counts in the community. Thus the child not only acts as a responsible member of the classroom, but also challenges others to think about appropriate behavior.

III. A Sense of Governing the Community. The teacher needs to create a climate in which the children can participate in making the rules for at least a part of their community life. In this climate, rules are discussed in open meetings where children are not only encouraged to challenge one another, but also the teacher in order to think of better ways for the community to resolve its problems.

IV. A Sense of Rewards and Consequences Operating for the Community. Children need to feel that their efforts contributing to the community are recognized and appreciated. Teachers create these feelings not only by praising children for their helping behaviors, but also by letting the other children know that this is behavior to be emulated. Conversely, students whose behavior detracts from the community life, learn that their behavior is not rewarded or appreciated. The teacher in this case strives not to destroy the child's feeling of self-worth, individualism, or belonging to the community, but lets the child know when his or her behavior is not consistent with community goals. Telling a child that certain behaviors are not welcomed, and that he or she can leave the community until he or she can devise a plan to do better, seems like a reasonable consequence to get this point across.¹⁰

If teachers employ genuine affection and approval while children achieve cognitive/academic successes, they will help their students gain self-respect and respect from their peer groups. The "right kind" of school experiences for children are crucial in assisting them in establishing values in regard to learning. If the school is organized in such a way that children rarely have the opportunity to interact with their teachers in any depth except in highly predetermined ways; or if children are moved about many times during the school day these critical learnings cannot take place.

Some Final Notes and Recommendations. Classroom upon classroom has a constant flow of children in and out to "special teachers" under the guise of

⁸Herbert Thelen, *Education and the Human Quest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 81.

⁹William Glasser, *Schools Without Failure* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 29.

¹⁰Glasser, p. 15.

individualization, "special help", remediation, and enrichment. While the child becomes known to many teachers from an academic point of view, the anonymity of the child is a factor in many large and subject organized schools. What solutions can be offered for this dilemma?

Perhaps we might consider reducing the school size first. There should be a movement initiated by educators in both elementary and secondary schools to cope with the effects of overly large student populations. However, school accrediting bodies are recommending just the opposite, encouraging consolidation of two or more elementary schools, each having a student population of 350-400 children. The mega-schools which result remind one of the Saxville instructional efficiency paradigm, and cannot hope to better the needs of the children they serve. In contrast, some educators have already recognized the benefits of small closely knit communities of teachers and children. New York City, for example, "has recently begun to experiment with new smaller schools of 500 students or less which might foster peace, intimacy, and interaction."¹¹

The social/emotional needs of children should be a second consideration when administrators and teachers organize their school and classroom schedules. It seems very likely that the self-contained classroom with various specialists working within that room would be a highly desirable organizational pattern, at least for a considerable number of elementary and middle school children. One school system is experimenting with keeping students and the teacher together over a three-year period. Officials of the Wellston, Missouri schools cite the lack of discipline and stability in the students' world at home as well as at school as reasons for trying this organizational concept.¹²

We must accept the facts which show that there is a growing tendency toward disruption and instability in children's lives. As educators, we need to address ourselves to this and determine and correct those elements in our school's organization which add to the problem. We must recognize that future generations will be strongly affected by a growing trend toward anonymity. While education is not being touted as a cure-all, we hope that by attempting to deal with the problem, educators can contribute to a fuller life for children caught by social forces over which they have no control.

RESUME

C'est la conviction des auteurs que les enfants atteignent à l'anonymat à cause de circonstances à la maison et de modèles d'organisation à l'école. Ils suggèrent quatre éléments clés qui sont à suivre lors de l'organisation de l'école pour l'enseignement et l'étude. L'article offre deux recommandations capitales afin d'améliorer la situation du manque de discipline et de stabilité dans le monde de l'enfant chez lui et à l'école.

¹¹Vincent Rogers, "Open Education in the U.S.: Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?" *Forum on Open Education*, 3, No. 3 (November, 1975), 7-13.

¹²"Three Years Together in Class," *Atlantic Journal-Constitution*, 11 April 1976.