

THE CONCEPTS OF A CHILD'S MIND ON ENTERING SCHOOL

A thesis written in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts.

John C. Thomas,
Saint Mary's University
School of Education.
April 30, 1960.

© Copyright

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter	
I. ATTITUDES AND HABITS	7
II. LANGUAGE AND LOGIC IN A CHILD	17
A Psychological View of Language and Thought Ego-centricity	
III. REALISM	33
Realism in Drawing Realism in Thought Causal Relations Nominal Realism	
IV. EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENT	45
General View Physical Environment Geographical Environment Social Environment Environment and Intelligence	
V. THE ROLE OF THE PRIMARY TEACHER	55
Knowledge of Behavior Patterns Emotional Stability Sense of Humour	
CONCLUSION	61

INTRODUCTION

It might be well at the outset of this paper to define the recurring terms of primary and child.

As used here, the term "primary" will include the school years between grade primary up to grade three inclusive, and not just the primary grade alone. The term "child", for the purpose of this paper, means the so-called average child between the ages of 5-8, which ages are generally considered as those embracing the primary years. This does not take into consideration either the gifted child or the retarded child. It does, however, include all the physical, social, and economic factors by which the average child is affected. For the sake of convenience, the child will be referred to as "he" so as to avoid the impersonal "it", although the term includes girls as well as boys.

The dictionary¹ defines primary in two ways. One is the first in advancement, and the other is first in importance. The former is merely the first stage in a series of progressive stages. The latter is more significant. It has the connotation of setting these grades aside not merely as a stage, but as an integral part. This would appear to be the more apt definition.

¹Funk and Wagnalls New College Standard Dictionary.

However, in this paper we include both meanings.

The primary child is like a little bird flitting from branch to branch, quick, eager, filled with boundless energy and an insatiable curiosity. Lighthearted and carefree, he glories in his freedom and he is filled with the beauty and freshness of life itself.² Still far from the person he will be in elementary school, he is now unstable and lacks the susceptibility to the formal methods which will characterize the later years. Primary itself "is perhaps a nodal point in development in somewhat the same sense as adolescence, and, like it, is fraught with deep potentiality."³ This potentiality is, unfortunately, often thwarted. The relative freedom of the child's own backyard during his pre-school days is radically changed, and "in such changed circumstances, not only does the personality have to undergo adjustive modification, but new physical habits and controls have to be superimposed upon the unrestraint and self-determination of yesterday."⁴

Adults consider the primary grades to be ridiculously

²Arnold Gesell and Beatrice Chandler Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education (New York: Ginn & Co., 1912), p.305.

³Ibid., p.311.

⁴Lawrence A. Averill, The Psychology of the Elementary School Child (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1949), p.88.

easy, but that is only because they view them in the light of their own knowledge and experience. Indeed, suspicion is cast upon the whole primary system to the extent that it is a dispensable unit.⁵ If primary consisted of nothing but the application of a school curriculum, this idea might have some justification. The implications involved in the transition between pre-school and primary are, however, staggering beyond imagination. Not only does this transition affect the child mentally, but also physically. Arnold Gesell, M.D., an able educator and director of the clinic of child development school of medicine at Yale University, had this to say;

Sometimes the transition to school is so blundering that it produces gastro-intestinal symptoms and severe emotional reactions. Here individual differences count. The sensitive and immature children suffer most. Difficulties of adjustment are exacerbated if the teacher has a cheerless, disciplinary personality, if the methods of instruction are over rigid with excess stress on academic proficiency, competitiveness and school marks. In some of these instances the tensions of school entrance are so abnormally weighted against the child that his mental health is over-taxed. School entrance is no simple transition and it should be tempered by flexible arrangements of attendance and program.⁶

At this point too, the young mind and will which appeared to be so certain and uncomplicated before school, are suddenly plunged into

⁵Gesell and Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education, p.303.

⁶Arnold Gesell and Frances L. Ilg, The Child from Five to Ten (4th ed; New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1946), pp.96-97.

a state of chaos.⁷ There is a clash of wills with one other than his parents and his struggle for understanding has him reaching out and grasping for security. He looks for adult help and guidance unless it places an undue strain upon him, and so patience, love, and understanding are essential.⁸ Here too, habits and attitudes are formed so as to instil a desire for learning. Failure to achieve this is often the fault of the school because "some primary schools are veritable tombs of deadened curiosity and initiative."⁹

The importance attached to the need for early education is by no means new. Almost twenty-four hundred years ago Plato expressed the opinion that the completeness of education depended upon the proper training carried on at an early age.¹⁰ In recent years there seems to have been a more significant attachment to the importance of primary education. Reference was made to this in 1933 by the then Superintendent of Schools for the Province of Nova Scotia;

In the educational scheme of things today nothing is more significant than the change of emphasis in the hierarchy of the school grades. Formerly - and even yet with

⁷Karl Bühler, The Mental Development of the Child, trans. Oscar Oeser (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1930), p.116.

⁸Gesell and Ilg, The Child from Five to Ten, p.65.

⁹Gesell and Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education, p.309.

¹⁰The Works of Plato, trans. Benjamin Jowett, vol.IV, bk.1; The Laws (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., n.d.), p.401.

some school authorities - the importance of a teaching position was measured by the academic content of the subject taught. On this standard the primary grades were, naturally, the easiest to teach. Accordingly, they were assigned to the novice at the minimum salary. As vacancies occurred, she was "promoted" to the higher grades, the salary varying directly as the expanded course of study. The higher one went up the ladder, it was argued, the more one's teaching ability was taxed, because one was getting nearer the upper ranges of adult knowledge.

In an uncritical age all this was taken for granted. But today the re-examination of educational postulates in the light of child psychology has reversed the traditional evaluations. The primary teacher, in many respects, now occupies the key position. The progress of the pupil depends upon the start he gets. To find the "personal equation" of the beginner, to direct his intellectual processes into the right grooves, to give proper bias to his social impulses, require a thorough grasp of first principles of child nature and a proven competence in applying them. It is just here, in the primary grades, that the real problem, of the teaching side, is to be found.¹¹

It would seem then, that in the entire educative process of an individual, the primary grades are one of the major contributors. It is a most obvious fact, and one recognized by teachers, especially those teaching at the level of junior high school and above, that dominant among the students of today are poor habits, attitudes, and lagging interest towards school, all of which tend to result in academic failures. The area most affected by these deficiencies is that of reading comprehension and the ability to think for oneself, although such deficiencies are almost bound to affect all

¹¹Annual Report of the Superintendent of Education for Nova Scotia, 1932-1933, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

other areas of learning;

The business of the primary grades is not to give information, but to teach the children how to get it. To teach them how to work independently is of more importance than to teach them the technique of reading. The grammar grades and the high school need pupils who can think; they have plenty who can memorize words. But they will continue to be surfeited with lip workers until the primary school agrees to train the thought powers of the child, until it makes use of its rare privilege to form happy associations in his mind with "study" and "work".¹²

It is not the purpose of this paper to make any inconsequential attempt to prove that primary is of extreme importance, however true it may be. The following chapters are nothing more than a factual presentation of attitudes and habits, the child's language, thought and realism. In conjunction with these are the effects of environment, and drawn from all these facts, the role of the primary teacher.

It is the purpose of this paper, however, to indicate, by virtue of the facts presented, that in those primary grades where the children are subjected to an excess of duty and formalism that:

Such formalistic uniformity and concerted action are foreign to the grace, spontaneity, and individuality of childhood. Children who grow up under such systematized direction are denied the very essence of mental growth, which depends upon original, constructive effort. The child [sic] mind loses its power to organize, and becomes as inconsequent as an atrophied muscle.¹³

¹²Gesell and Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education, p.236.

¹³Ibid., p.309.

CHAPTER 1

ATTITUDES AND HABITS

Attitudes

General View

Despite all the complexities of the process of education, there has been built up in the mind of the general public the idea that the school serves but two basic functions. These two functions are the imparting of knowledge and the training of skills, particularly those skills pertaining to the fields of English, Science and Mathematics. This is a natural assumption because for many generations those were the prime functions of education even in the minds of educators themselves.¹ With the advent of such sciences as psychiatry and psychology, however, where the physical and mental development of the child has come under a more detailed examination, the idea of the basic functions of education has changed considerably. This trend of thought, together with the changing culture of our society, has resolved in the minds of most educators the prime importance of a healthy development of attitudes:

In consequence, the modern age is confronted with a brand of culture and citizenship that is long on fact, broad on skill and mechanization, but woefully shallow in those

¹Averill, The Elementary School Child, pp.50-51.

human values and appreciations and convictions that alone must be relied on to give direction and guidance in a world that has grown to the complexity of ours in the middle twentieth century.²

There is general recognition of the fact that attitudes represent dispositions to behave in certain ways. By definition;

Our attitudes are certain ways of viewing things - gained from our environment, changed by the working of our mind and our imagination, and somewhat influenced by our physical endowment, particularly by our emotions.³

More briefly, an attitude "is an idea fringed with emotion."⁴

Attitudes, as such, may be divided into attitudes concerned with ideals, and attitudes concerned with appreciation. One is a motivating power and concerns itself with the field of human conduct, while the other is the development of cultural values and an appreciation of all that is beautiful in life.⁵

Since attitudes are related to emotional responses, they assist in the production of emotional behavior, and so could be said to have a tremendous influence upon a child's whole life. Children

²Ibid., p.51.

³E.J.Ross, Fundamental Sociology (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1939), p.44.

⁴William F. Cunnigham, The Pivotal Problems of Education (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1940), p.310.

⁵Ibid., p.310.

in the primary grades may be in possession of attitudes and opinions which are as firmly planted as they are in adults.⁶ Such attitudes may remain rigidly fixed for a considerable period of time, and many years and as many teachers may be required to effect any change, if any can be made at all.⁷ Fortunately, however, most children are easily subject to change and their attitudes and opinions may not be adamantly resolved until later on in school life or adulthood.

Sources of Attitudes

in Adults

Every adult's personality is stamped with its own individuality. Likes and dislikes vary with the individual, and even when these are shared by more than one, they tend to vary in intensity. Thus several men may like to indulge in the sport of fishing, but each may be quite different in his degree of participation. Others cannot even bear to handle a worm or take a hook from the mouth of a fish, and so adopt a negative approach towards this sport. Such attitudes must obviously lie in the background of man's experiences. If these experiences are favourable, then certain positive attitudes are adopted; if unfavourable, then

⁶Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.51.

⁷Cecil V. Millard, Child Growth and Development in the Elementary School Years (Boston: D.C.Heath & Co., 1951), p.318.

these attitudes tend to be negative. Gradually such attitudes become fixed and so go to form a part of the individual's whole personality.

Sources of Attitudes in Children

The child forms attitudes in much the same manner as the adult. The chief difference lies in the fact that the areas of experience from which attitudes are formed are far more restricted in the child than in the adult.⁸ Because of this, it would appear sensible to assume that if the experiences of a child were made favourable concerning those things relating to the school, then the child's attitudes towards school would be decidedly healthier.

Averill distinguishes five different influences which go to make up the experiential background necessary for the formation of attitudes in a child before and after school entrance.⁹ These are:

1. The culture pattern of his racial stock which awakens in him the fundamentals of loyalty, national pride, and a knowledge and acceptance of the mores of his race. So influential can his culture pattern be, that;

If he passes his first five years in an area where the

⁸Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.52.

⁹Ibid., pp.52-57.

color feeling is strong, he may become so bitterly and pugnaciously antagonistic to those of another contiguous race as to have his entire subsequent emotional life warped and distorted.¹⁰

2. The family influence which plays a dominant role in the formation of attitudes. These influences produce in the child a personality which can range from the well-adjusted to the mal-adjusted, due to homes varying in degree from the prosperous to the impoverished, both economically and intellectually;

Salutary or unsalutary, the influence is there, already exerting itself unmistakably in the genesis and growth of juvenile attitudes towards themselves as individuals, towards other children in the vicinity, towards the teacher as an adult in loco parentis, and toward the total unfolding environment of learning and of social growth and adjustment.¹¹

3. The teacher, who, with the rest of the school environment, brings the child into contact with influences which will affect his attitudes over many, if not all, of his school years; "Much of the teacher's influence is obvious in the shaping and reshaping of children's attitudes."¹² This influence is exerted not only by the industry of the teacher, but also by the subtle influence of her own personality.

4. The environment from which the child comes, which reflects

¹⁰Ibid., p.52.

¹¹Ibid., p.54.

¹²Ibid., p.55.

all the attitudes of his community as it exists apart from the home itself.

5. The influences derived from the child's contact with other children;

Every parent, teacher, and layman knows the socio-moral dangers that children of good standards and habits are subjected to by the presence among them of even a single child who departs radically from the accepted and conventional standards of conduct.¹³

Thus a child enters school with attitudes which, in most cases, need adjustment in some form or another. In comparison with the influences just cited, the school, as a more influential agent, is questionable because the school, in terms of time, is of relatively short duration.¹⁴ Nevertheless, by virtue of its advantage in early training, the school plays a highly important role. Parents and teachers, because of their many more years of experience, tend to forget that attitudes do not form overnight, nor do they suddenly crystallize as a result of a few wise admonishments. In his lofty expectations, the adult is inclined to forget that the child does not think or reason in exactly the same manner as he does, and so fails to make allowance for his needs. Even in the presentation of simple facts the child can be

¹³Ibid., p.57.

¹⁴Millard, Child Growth and Development, p.318.

developing attitudes. Thus attitudes, properly motivated, play a great role in the future development of the primary child;

In still a broader sense, when a child is learning facts and skills in his schoolroom experience, he is also formulating attitudes that will follow him always in his subsequent life. If, for example, he fails, or grows discouraged, or is criticized in his study of any field, he is extremely likely to develop dislike for that subject, and there is good probability that his dislike will spread to include a distaste for all subjects, for all learning, for school and teachers, perhaps even for society itself that maintains schools and compels him to attend them.¹⁵

Habits

General View

By definition, a habit is "an acquired aptitude for some particular mode of action."¹⁶ By the repetition of these actions an individual is able to perform them with ease and spontaneity and with very little deliberation.

It would seem at first glance that there is little difference between habits and attitudes. The distinction is present, however, although the dividing line is rather a fine one. Concerning this difference Averill says;

Habits are basally physical, muscular, skeletal. They concern one's gait, posture, form in doing things, table

¹⁵Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.63.

¹⁶Raymond J. Anable, S.J., Philosophical Psychology (New York: Fordham University Press, 1941), p.208.

manners, manual skills, characteristic physical reactions, and so forth. Attitudes, on the other hand, are mental habits, such as viewpoints, convictions, outlooks, and the like. The two obviously overlap, and one may be the prelude to or the outgrowth of the other. Both follow similar laws of development; both are consequences of repeated reactions in identical situations; both may be broken down, modified, and perfected; both will arise spontaneously in the raw, apart from specific instruction and training, as a result of an individual's exposure and experience; taken together, the two - habits and attitudes - comprise a large share of the expressive life of the individual; together they constitute the major component of personality and character.¹⁷

From this, it would seem to follow that habits will become very obvious in the young pre-school child before attitudes begin to take on any definite pattern. By the time he enters school, these habits should be fairly well established. These would include such habits as neatness, politeness, cleanliness, initiative, and the like. Although all good habits are desirable things to instil in a child, that of initiative appears to rank with the most important. It is this spirit of initiative which will permit the child to cope with his later years of school life with greater ease and dexterity;

The duty of the primary school is to form habits of self-help, - habits which will be useful to the child throughout his whole school life, not habits which will have to be broken as soon as he reaches the grammar grades.¹⁸

Oftentimes these desirable habits may be difficult for the child to form for himself, or to be assisted in their formation by

¹⁷Averill, The Elementary School Child, pp.71-72.

¹⁸Gesell and Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education, p.231.

the teacher. Even those children who have had the very best of training at home may find their good habits inadequate in helping them to adjust to the new situations which arise in their contact with others of their own age. Much patience and persistence in supervision in the habit formation of these children is most necessary on the part of the primary school once the children have left the protective influence of the home.¹⁹

In his classical chapter on habits, William James refers to habits as "the enormous fly-wheel of society."²⁰ He emphasizes the importance of establishing early in life the intellectual and moral habits so necessary for the proper development of the pupil;

The great thing, then, in all education, is to make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy. It is to fund and capitalize our acquisitions, and live at ease upon the interest of the fund. For this we must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can, and guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us, as we should guard against the plague.²¹

Following up with this, he says; "Could the young realize how soon they would become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give

¹⁹Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.73.

²⁰William James, "Ethical Implications of the Law of Habit," Readings in Ethics, ed. J.F.Leibell (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1926), p.272.

²¹Ibid., pp.273-274.

more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state."²²

While a good habit is a most praiseworthy acquisition, it also "tends to destroy the very plasticity which gave it birth."²³ By virtue of its somewhat unconscious repetition, its performance becomes one of dull, unthinking routine. The urge for discovery, change, or originality is stifled, and the individual becomes as an automaton, efficient, perhaps, but tireless and unchanging in the uniformity of his actions. This, in the final analysis, destroys the art of true workmanship.²⁴

²²Ibid., p.278.

²³Gesell and Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education, p.74.

²⁴Ibid., pp.74-75.

CHAPTER 2

LANGUAGE AND LOGIC IN A CHILD

Language - General View

Language is one of the greatest achievements of mankind. It is constantly growing, not by any fixed laws of proportion, but in conformity with the ever-changing conditions of the world. Animals are known to have methods of communicating with one another, but all animal communication lacks that fine shade of meaning so peculiar to verbal speech. Despite this, it is only insofar as "he can express in language his thoughts and his goals can man ever hope to rise above the animal level of instinct and of random, purposeless behavior."¹

Social instinct fosters language and where this instinct is subdued language tends to become lifeless. Speech comes naturally when there is a desire for speech, and small children who are in the stage of language-making are filled with this desire. However, desire is dependent upon newness. We are not desirous of something too commonplace, or something which we already have in our possession. The emotions and impressions of children are strong because they

¹Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.166.

grow from the newness of their contact with life. They are vitalized by the wonders and mysteries of nature far more than adults. They are, as the expression goes, "full of life" - life from whose vast storehouse of raw material language is born.

Function of Language

Language is more than speech. It is the communication of ideas. A.F.Watts extends this idea even further;

To put it more formally, language serves to assist memory and facilitate thought; to communicate meaning and, when necessary, to conceal it; to express feeling and, when necessary, to disguise it; to state intentions or merely to intimate their nature; to influence or control the actions of others; and sometimes to provide substitute satisfactions for those that would normally follow upon the exercise of bodily activity.²

Through the use of language man can pass along to future generations all his learnings and thoughts. The child to whom the intricacies of language have not been made available has insurmountable barriers raised against his development. The sooner communicative facility is achieved by the child, the sooner he is able to benefit in all his personal and social needs.

Language and Thought

It is difficult to imagine any clear distinction between language and thought. One is presumably able to hold to the

²A.F.Watts, The Language and Mental Development of Children (Boston: D.C.Heath & Co., 1948), p.17.

traditional view that thought first occurs in the mind and after much analysing the thinker will then search for ways and means of expressing it to others. At the same time one may hold to the more modernistic view that it is a common practice among many to really think about an idea only after the general concept has been expressed. This is especially characteristic of children, and it is this which gives rise to the oft repeated advice to children that they should think before they speak. Regardless of what view one holds, there is certainly a relationship between the two to the extent that neither language nor thought is capable of becoming an absolutely separate entity.

A Psychological View of

Language and Thought

Language

Unlike an adult, a child thinks and expresses himself in a very specific manner. He does not bother stopping to debate the logic or illogic of an answer. When he asks a question almost any answer one may give can satisfy him quite easily. His verbalism is most peculiar and he readily believes things even though they may be contrary to fact.

The question may often arise in the mind of a person who has taken the time to listen to the 4 or 5 year old whether or not language is merely a means of having company and attention. Just as

men and women are sometimes guilty of talking to themselves, so the obscure thought of a child finds an outlet in verbal expression;

In observing the five-year-old, one notes how incessantly he talks to himself. His vocal apparatus is unfolding and limbering up, along with his other muscular mechanisms, and he enjoys in exercising it quite as much as he does them.³

Piaget summarized this with a bit more conciseness when he said of a child that "he has no verbal continence."⁴ In this instance there may be no intention of communicating ideas. Even when communication is intended, comprehension is oftentimes difficult because there are many expressions which have a very clear meaning to an adult, but which may be retained by a child for many years with a meaning far less rich than that of an adult mind. This is well illustrated by the following:

Metrical language in particular is subject to this interpretative error in children's ears and minds. One youthful religionist, for example, was accustomed to sing lustily in his Sunday school class about "wanting to go there," but if you want to get there "don't chew" tobacco. Another interpreted "the consecrated cross I'd bear" as "the consecrated cross-eyed bear."⁵

Classification of Language

A child's language can be generally classified as ego-centric

³Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.168.

⁴Jean Piaget, The Language and Thought of the Child, trans. Marjorie Gabain (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., Inc., 1926), p.38.

⁵Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.180.

language and socialized speech. At the point of entering school a child is predominately ego-centric, that is his language is concerned primarily with himself rather than with those about him.⁶ It must be noted at this point that language here does not simply mean vocal reaction. Language also embodies such things as imitation, signs, gestures, as well as facial, dramatic and physical expression.

Ego-centricity of language involves three separate, but closely related phases. The first of these is the tendency of the child to imitate. Little reason can be found for this except for the pure and simple pleasure of talking. It is not uncommon to see a child of about school age busily engaged at some work, and at the same time repeating over and over some word or expression which he had heard previously. Whether or not this repetition is conscious is strictly a matter of conjecture, but in all probability it is more often unconscious.

Secondly, an urge exists in a child simply to talk. As stated above, this often takes the form of talking to himself. In his utterances he says nothing in particular, nor does he intend to. Not only is he indefinite in his speech, but he is likewise indefinite as to the direction his speech takes. Although he may seemingly address himself to a specific person, he does not expect an answer nor does he wait for one.

⁶Ibid., pp.173-174.

This undirected speech leads to the third phase, in which an idea may be expressed, but not to any specific person. As a matter of fact, it matters little whether or not the other person or persons hear him, agree with him, or disagree with him. It rarely occurs to the child to wonder if he has been understood because he does not really think of others as he talks. It is only when he is interested enough for some specific reason in wanting himself to be understood that the child's language begins to resemble that of the adult.⁷

In this second division of a child's language, broadly termed as socialized speech, the child is strictly communicative. In this instance he speaks directly to another with the idea of trying to make himself understood. This may take the form of straight information, criticism, commands, threats, requests, questions, or answers. Speech between the ages of 5 and 7 has little, if anything at all, in the form of explanation. Like arguments, there is nothing more than a clash of affirmatives and practically no attempt at logical justification. At about the age of 7, a desire to work with others begins to manifest itself and the ego-centricity of the child's language loses some of its importance and the child begins to understand another in spoken

⁷Piaget, Language and Thought, pp.10-20.

explanation.⁸ With the diminishing of ego-centricity, socialized speech becomes more pronounced, and relatively intelligent arguments begin to take place. From this point on the child's mind matures easily because it is "through the habit of arguing we first become conscious of the rules of logic and the rules of deductive reasoning."⁹ Before the age of 7 ego-centricity is considerable and language is far from socialized. This is because the child's language is made up of two distinct features; gestures, mimicry, movement, etc., which not only accompany words, but on many occasions even supplant them; and the spoken word alone. However, gestures are not able to express all that the child wants to express, and so the intellectual process has a tendency to remain ego-centric while the language of play and action will tend to become more socialized. Because of this, children, in games and manual work, are capable of understanding one another while saying very little verbally.

Thought

Piaget considers a child's mind as being divided into two planes, the upper plane and the lower plane.¹⁰ The more important

⁸Gesell and Ilg, The Child from Five to Ten, p.133.

⁹Piaget, Language and Thought, p.20.

¹⁰Piaget, Language and Thought. Piaget alludes to this idea of the duability of planes throughout the book

of the two is the lower plane which consists of the work done by the child himself. In this plane are the many wants of the child and the actual work he accomplishes in an effort to satisfy these wants. The upper plane follows the first, and is brought into existence by the child's social environment. Primarily, it is the plane of speech and of logical idea, or in other words, the plane of reality. This plane gradually becomes so overloaded that it breaks apart, and the pieces of which it is composed drop into the plane below. Here they become mixed with the pieces which rightfully belong there. Other pieces are not able to drop into the lower plane and so hang between the two. The onlooker, who is unaware of this duability of planes, receives the impression of utter confusion in the child. In actual fact, however, each of these planes has a separate logic of its own, and thus in a child's mind a concept might be perfectly clear, while the onlooker may consider him to be completely perplexed.¹¹

As in an adult, the child has two basic but completely separate types of thinking. The first is thought which is consciously directed. In this instance he seeks an answer to some specific problem. The second is sub-conscious thought, commonly called autistic thought or wishful thinking. Autistic thought is

¹¹Piaget, Language and Thought, p.xii.

not concerned with conscious thought.¹² It leads to an imaginative world of dreams where truth is subservient to the satisfaction of desires which are expressed not by words, but by symbols and myths. Children like to consider themselves grown up, regardless of their age. Quite presumably, it is because of his physical and social inferiority that a child wishes himself into situations which will satisfy his ego. In order to achieve this, he discards logic and believes only that which he wishes to believe. If, for example, he wishes to believe that he is the strongest boy in the class, then in his own mind he becomes so, despite the fact that the sizes of some of the other boys very firmly give evidence to the fact that he is not.

To the child, simple, everyday reasoning requires little or no verification. This is due to the ego-centricity of a child's thinking. Because of this he shares in a less intellectual life than does the adult. Almost everything with which a child comes in contact has a personal relationship with him, and hence he does not easily give up any judgements which he has made. This is illustrated by the fact that a child will believe that the moon follows him wherever he goes. This idea is generally held by children at about the age of 5 years. Jean Piaget found this to be a common

¹²An interesting aspect of wishful thinking is dealt with by Watts in The Language and Mental Development of Children, pp.231-232.

misconception among young children at the Institut J.J.Rousseau in Geneva;

NAI (4 $\frac{1}{2}$): "When you go for a walk in the evening does the moon stay still? - It comes with me, it follows us."

The daughter of Rasmussen R., at 4 years old, exclaimed, on seeing the moon: "It's the moon, it's round...it walks when we walk." It was explained to R. that this was not true, but three months later she made the same remark in connection with the stars: "What are those little bright things up there? When we walk, they walk too, but they don't really do it."¹³

It is difficult to understand the mental life of children. It is pointless to question them about it for they have neither the knowledge nor the language to express what takes place in their minds. All that can be done is to try to evaluate their thinking in terms of some accepted adult procedure. At the same time, it must be realized that adult reasoning and thinking follow along specific patterns that are known and understood, whereas childish thought cannot be clearly defined. The logic of both the child and the adult may be as different as day is from night, and yet at the same time both may be completely valid. Perhaps one of the gravest mistakes made by parents and teachers alike is to consider the child as a miniature adult. Few adults, if any, are capable of remembering the reasons behind their childish language or actions.

¹³Jean Piaget, The Child's Conception of Physical Causality, trans. Marjorie Gabain (New York: The Humanities Press, Inc., 1951), p.74.

Hence the tendency exists to compare childish thinking with adult logic. When this occurs a child's language and thought often appear senseless. Such an assumption on the part of the adult need not be detrimental to the child provided the child realizes that "logical activity is not the whole of intelligence. One can be intelligent without being particularly logical."¹⁴ It is language more so than logic by which we are able to determine the intelligence of the average child. Of this Averill says;

Language is an excellent index of intelligence at any level, and those children who are deficient in its use are frequently found to be deficient also in general intelligence.¹⁵

An excellent illustration comes to mind which not only demonstrates a valid, but seemingly senseless, piece of logic, but also indicates how a concept may be retained by a child in an erroneous manner for many years. A young boy was recently asked where the trolley coaches in Halifax came from. In reply to this question he unhesitatingly stated that the stork brought them. To the casual observer this reply would at once appear completely nonsensical. In actual fact, however, when the old tram car system was abolished in the City of Halifax in 1949, and the system of trolley coaches was introduced, the company operating

¹⁴Jean Piaget, Judgement and Reasoning in the Child, trans. Marjorie Gabain (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1951), p.166.

¹⁵Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.169.

these trolley coaches displayed posters depicting a stork carrying a small coach in the same manner as we are accustomed to seeing babies delivered. This picture was obviously retained by the child and it never entered his head to dispute its validity.

A parallel exists between the language and the thought of a child inasmuch as both are ego-centric. A child's thinking apparently takes on ego-centricity when it becomes an intermediate form between direct conscious thought and autistic thought. This intermediate form may best be illustrated rather than described by a very common example of a situation which is found among children and adults alike. As it often happens, we have occasion, at times, to look for the solution to some problem. During the course of our reading, or listening, or whatever the case may be, the solution to the problem suddenly becomes quite clear. Upon trying to explain this solution to someone else, however, we find that we know little or nothing about it. The conclusions about which we seemed so positive are now quite doubtful, and great discrepancies appear in our arguments. Thus from our own experience we are able to determine a difference between a personal understanding and the spoken word of explanation. Children of about ages 4-7 will generally always answer in the affirmative if asked if they understood a question just asked of them or of something just explained. Very few, however, are able to repeat such an explanation with any great degree of accuracy.

Ego-centricity

The understanding of ego-centricity is quite necessary if one is to understand the actions of children. To the child, he is the centre of his environment. His own experience and actions, as well as the actions of others, all revolve about himself. Piaget was of the opinion that approximately 50 percent of all thinking under the age of 5 years is ego-centric. At the age of $6\frac{1}{2}$ years the thought of a child in his spoken manifestations is about 44-47 percent, and the age when a child "begins to communicate his thoughts (the age when ego-centric language is 25 percent) is probably somewhere between 7-8."¹⁶ There is no insinuation here that a sharp dividing line may be drawn, and at the age of 8 children immediately understand one another. What it does mean is that children are conscious of their ability and make sincere efforts to try to reach a mutual understanding. Until this age they change opinion quite easily, even though the new opinions are contradictory. The rapidity with which they adopt successive opinions seems to suggest that they forget the point of view they previously held.

It seems logical to assume that since children are mostly ego-centric in thought, they are more capable of understanding each other than they are of understanding adults, since they are

¹⁶Piaget, Language and Thought, p.49.

accustomed to this type of thinking. This understanding is, of course, purely a verbal one. In conversation, through gestures, etc., understanding is of a higher plane. In this instance it matters little if the talk is intelligent or not since the speaker has the object in view. This is demonstrated in such childish talk as; "That does that, and then it goes there, and it goes like that."¹⁷

As has been previously stated, children between the ages of 3-6 are convinced that they understand what is said and will always admit so when asked. Only when ego-centricity begins to diminish, i.e. at about the age of 7-8 and above, will the child make any attempt to question the speaker. When the child attempts to repeat that which he has learned, his story, being ego-centric, carries insufficient information and the listener enjoys little understanding. So it is that ego-centrism is the very reason itself that children fail to understand each other properly because they are only thinking of themselves. Also, children under the age of 7 find it difficult to separate fact from fancy, while children of 7-8 attempt to understand and to be understood in return;

This distinction between our two groups of children is one of very great importance. It proves that the effort to understand other people and to communicate one's

¹⁷Piaget, Language and Thought, p.77.

thought objectively does not appear in children before the age of 7 or $7\frac{1}{2}$. It is not because the smaller children were romancing that they failed to understand each other in our experiments. In cases where there was no invention the same phenomenon of faulty understanding was observed to take place. On the contrary, it is because he is still ego-centric and feels no desire either to communicate with others or to understand them that the child is able to invent as the spirit moves him, and to make so light of the objectivity of his utterances.¹⁸

The ego-centricity of the child's thought and language induces him to ascribe to objects values which are both personal and self-centered. Thus; the swing in the yard is mine for me to swing on; it is my turn even though others may have missed theirs; this game of ball is for me to excel in; the game of make-believe is for me and so I must be the hero; the new lawn is mine so it is permissible for me to walk on it; the goodies in the refrigerator are there so that I may indulge; a new magazine is for me to look at, paint, cut-out before others have had a chance to see it. Most parents would consider it wise to attempt a system of training whereby these ego-centric values are changed to a more common set of social values, although as may be suspected, such a venture may not be too successful before the decline of the factor of ego-centrism itself. Teachers in general will agree, however, that these values are unchanged as late as the ages of 10-12. Some retain these ego-centric values well into their "teens" and there are the unfortunate few who never change, and if so, late in life.

¹⁸Piaget, Language and Thought, p.126.

In order to verify this one has only to supervise a schoolyard and observe the children at play. Cries of, "It's mine", "I'm first", "It's my turn", are heard everywhere. Arguments, pushing, snatching, shouts of denunciation, sulking and petulance are all indications of the retention of ego-centric values. If one can appreciate such a situation in older children, then it is possible to understand the strength of ego-centrism in primary children, and so make allowances for their selfishness.

CHAPTER 3

REALISM

Realism in Drawings

Intellectual realism is first noticed in children's drawings. A child draws what he sees, whether it be a house, men, animals, etc. In this respect he is a realist. However, instead of drawing them as he sees them, he reduces them to a specific type; that is, he draws them as he knows them and understands them. This changes the aspect of realism to intellectual rather than visual. This is exemplified by a child drawing a face in profile and then adding not one, but two eyes. Here the child draws a face not as he sees it, but as he knows it to be;

The child draws almost entirely from memory, "out of its head" as we say. If it wants to draw a man, it does not look around for a model or a copy, but cheerfully goes ahead with its task and puts into the drawing whatever it knows about a man and whatever comes to its mind. The man must have two eyes, even in profile, the horseman two legs. Clothes are hung about him afterwards, as one would clothe a doll. One can see what is in his pockets and the coins in his purse, as in an X-ray photograph.¹

Extended to reasoning, this realism assumes the same process. In his deductive reasoning the child takes the practical part of the premise and examines it alone. Reality is a necessary part of

¹Bühler, The Mental Development of the Child, pp.114-115.

him and he will contradict himself rather than lose it. Like the drawing, however, this realism to which he adheres so strongly is not the result of mere observation, but rather what he knows. What interests him may not concern us in the least, and thus some of his observations may, at times, seem rather startling; "Form is for him but the symbols, not the mirror of reality; hence his splendid disdain for accurate outline and his beautiful naive interest in the meaning of the story."²

Realism in Thought

Few people think of their own accord unless some problem presents itself that is within range of comprehension. As do many adults, a child will spontaneously attack a problem which bears some personal reference to himself. Such personal achievements are attractive and a child will normally summon all his resources to attain them. Problems not involving himself personally are scorned by a primary child as a rule. One dominant factor holds him to do well, however, particularly in school. This factor is the desire to remain on a level with the class and to win the approval of the teacher. This motivating force holds many primary children to tasks remote from personal interest.

Thinking involves thought, and it is the idea of thought

²Gesell and Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education, p.128.

with which we are presently concerned. Thought is ego-centric at first, but when the child begins to take others besides himself into consideration his thought becomes more socialized, and so his logic begins to develop. Before this occurs, however, the child has great difficulty in distinguishing the difference between mind and body. Even immaterial things are to him concrete. The object and the idea of the object are not clearly discerned. There is no precise line of demarkation when the child is able to distinguish the difference between the two, but Piaget has found that "thing and concept are still confused at the age of 7."³ At about the age of 5-6 children tend to consider thought not only as a material thing, but also vary in their opinion as to its location. In general, however, thought is considered to be in the mouth;

SCHMI (5½): "What do people think with? - The mouth."

MUY (6): "What do you think with? - With something, with my mouth."⁴

Besides the mouth, some believe that thinking is done with the ears;

BARB (5½): "You know what it means to think? - When you can't remember something, you think. - What do you think with? - The ears. - If you could stop them up, could you think? - Yes...no..."

³Jean Piaget, The Child's Conception of the World, trans. Joan and Andrew Tomlison (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1951), p.55.

⁴Ibid., p.40.

REHM (5:11): "You know what it means to think of something? Yes. - Think of your house. - Yes. - What do you think with? - With the ears. - When you think of your house, you think with the ears? - Yes."⁵

Such an idea is carried on even up to the age of 8;

RATT (8:10): "When you think of your house, where is what you think? - In the head.- What is there inside your head? Nothing. - How can you think of your house then? - With the mouth. - Are there words inside your head? - No. - Is there a voice? - Yes. - Are the voice and thinking the same thing? - Yes."⁶

This latter is a good example of the association children have of the voice and thought. This is so because the two are primarily considered as material things. The voice and the mouth are closely related and hence when the belief exists that thought is in the mouth, then voice becomes thought itself emerging from within the mouth. Restricted as he is to perceive relations, the child is obviously hampered in his ability to understand such things that apply relationships. He does not, for example, know what it is to be a good citizen because he is unable to associate the meaning of citizenship with honesty, patriotism, civic-mindedness, and all the other aspects which go to make up citizenship. It is his acceptance of rather weird relationships which enables the child to accept the fact that Santa Claus is able to satisfy the insatiable desires of every child in the world in a

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., pp.40-41.

single night, or to wonder at, and believe, all the magical delights of the make-believe world of fairy tales.

Causal Relations

A rather interesting treatment of this unquestioned mis-interpretation of relationships is further observed in Piaget's study of the child's limitations in understanding causal relationship. Most of the children he examined associated wind with breathing;

BAT (4): "Blow on your finger. Where does the air come from? - From my mouth. - And where does the air in your mouth come from? - From the window."⁷

ROY (6): "Where does the air come from? - From inside us. And where does the air inside us come from? - From outside our bodies. - And the air in our bodies? - Because you get fat, there's air that comes (the air comes because we grow fat, it comes to make us fat and we make it come by growing fatter). - Where does it come from? From outside."⁸

ANT (8): "When you breathe, the air comes into the mouth; when you blow, it comes out of the mouth again." - "Where is this breath? - In the stomach. - Why? - Because we must have air." "When you breathe, the breathing attracts the air."⁹

Concerning clouds and heavenly bodies;

STEI (5): "What makes the clouds move along? - God does. How? - He pushes them."¹⁰

⁷Piaget, Physical Causality, p.53.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p.56.

¹⁰Ibid., p.63.

GAND (6): "Why does the sun move along? - To keep us warm."
"Is the sun alive? - Yes because it moves along." "And the moon, how does it move along? - It's God...It's God that does it."¹¹

BRUL (8): "The clouds push it," but without wind or clouds "it goes all the same." ... "It goes by itself."¹²

Piaget found from his many and varied experiments that a child before the age of 7-8 was unable to arrive at a true explanation of natural phenomenon. A more positive form begins to take place after the age of 7-8. At about the age of 11-12 a fairly reliable explanation is able to be proposed.¹³

While some of the foregoing examples may seem uncritical, some adults are no more logical in their explanations. For example, a baseball player is in the midst of a terrible "slump" because his favourite uniform is being repaired; a business man can make no wrong decisions because he is carrying his great-grandfather's charmed medallion; Mr. Smith's front tire had a blow-out because he had walked under a ladder that morning. If adults are inclined to make so light of causal relations, certainly allowances can be made for children. At least a child will outgrow his conceptions, while for the adult engulfed in such hokus-pokus superstition there seems little chance of salvation.

¹¹Ibid., p.75.

¹²Ibid., p.77.

¹³Ibid., p.267.

Age of Reason

The fact that a child has difficulty in explaining the true cause of physical phenomena does not infer that he is completely unable to distinguish the difference between cause and effect in all things. It is true that the age of 7 has been used as a point in time when a child is said to have reached the use of reason, but this is a maximum value rather than a minimum. There is no age at which a sharp line of demarkation may be drawn by which we are able to say that on one side reasoning is dormant and on the other side it is awakened. The ability to conclude, infer and to solve problems is present in many children at an early age. Naturally we cannot expect a one-year-old to be able to place a square peg in a square hole, but we do know his awareness that certain preparations made by his mother mean that he will soon receive bodily comforts;

Thus the so-called "use of reason", or "age of reason", is not an overnight illumination, coming at about the age of six. We associate it commonly with that age, for it is about that time that the average child, from repeated sense experience (personal or teaching), begins to show a personal grasp of fundamental basic ideas, relations, etc."¹⁴

Nominal Realism

General View

Shortly after Adam was created he proceeded to give names

¹⁴Anable, Philosophical Psychology, p.71.

to all the works of creation. This would seem to be a most logical step even if it was not revealed to us in the Book of Genesis. It would be virtually impossible to convey an idea of anything, either concrete or abstract, unless some title was attached to it that could be understood by everyone. With infant children the naming function is one of the first things acquired. Without it, language would be impossible. The names which the child learns to use, however, may be very remote from that used by an adult. Associations in the child's mind are legion, and his application of one name with other instances leads us to understand what the name really means to him. Thus the child who has learned the name for a motorboat and eventually applies it to a sputtering stove, shows that the name "motorboat" was not the name seen, but rather the name heard. Even this example may not be clear to one who has never seen nor heard a single-cylinder engine, or one who has never had the enjoyment of sitting before a wood or coal stove and listening to the variety of soothing sounds which issue therefrom. Adults can be quite easily misled into believing that children understand our language. This is illustrated from the writings of a missionary who wished to find out from a group of children the native word for "table". In order to acquire this information he tapped the top of the table and asked what it was;

There were five or six boys standing around, and, tapping the table with my forefinger, I asked, "What is this?" One boy said it was a dodela, another that it was

an etanda, a third stated that it was bokali, a fourth that it was elamba, and the fifth that it was meza. ... One lad thought that we wanted the word for tapping; another that we were seeking the word for the material of which the table was made; another had an idea that we required the word for hardness; another thought that we wished for a name for that which covered the table; and the last, not being able, perhaps, to think of anything else, gave us the word meza, table - the very word we were seeking.¹⁵

The inability, or failure, to use specific terms can lead to a great deal of misunderstanding even among adults. With children preciseness is even more important.

Placement of Names

The necessity and interest in names is indicated by the conversation of two boys at the Rousseau Institut;

AR (6½): remarked during a building game: "And when there weren't any names ..."

BO (6½): replied: "If there weren't any words it would be very awkward.....You couldn't make anything. How could things have been made" (if there hadn't been names for them?)¹⁶

To the child words are of the greatest importance because it is by the dealing in words that he believes himself to think. A certain amount of confusion arises from this belief. This confusion takes on three forms:

¹⁵A.F.Watts, The Language and Mental Development of Children, pp.146-147 referring to a quote in The Meaning of Meaning, by C.K.Ogden and I.A.Richards (London: Kegan Paul, 1923).

¹⁶Piaget, Conception of the World, p.62.

¹⁷Ibid., p.78.

1. There is confusion between the name of a thing and the thing itself;

HORN (5:3): says that a name is "What we use when we want to say something, or call someone. - Where is the name of the sun? - High up in the sky. - Where? - In the sun. - Where is your name? - There (indicating the thorax)."

MART (8:10): "Where is the name of the sun? - In the sky. Is it the sun or the name of the sun that is in the sky? The name. - Why in the sky? - Because it is in the sky."¹⁷

2. There is confusion about thought as being in the mouth and in the air around. In this form the child freely admits that the names are in the air. She refuses to admit, however, that the names originate in herself. The name comes from the object itself and appears in the voice where it is forced out by speech;

ROC (6½, a girl): "Now tell me, where is the name of the sun? - In the sky. - The sun is in the sky. But where is the name? - In the sky. - Where? - Everywhere. - Where? In all the houses. - Is the name of the sun here? - Yes. Where? - In schools and in the classrooms. - Where in the classrooms? - Everywhere. - Is it in this room? - Yes. Where else? - In the corners. - Where else? - In all the little corners (pointing to the surrounding air)."¹⁸

3. In this form the child admits that names are contained in the head;

BUS (10): "Where are names? The name of the sun for instance? In the head. - Whose head? - Ours, everyone's except those who don't know it."¹⁹

This phase continues until about the age of 11, after which thought

¹⁷Ibid., p.74.

¹⁸Ibid., p.75.

¹⁹Ibid., p.76.

is regarded as an immaterial thing.

Names and Realism - a Summary

From the foregoing it may be seen that there is obviously a close relationship between the child's use of names and the idea of thought. These two appear to be tied together by the child's realism which takes on the three varieties already mentioned.

First there is the confusion as to whether the names are the signs or the things; that is, he cannot rightly differentiate between the mental image of an object and the actual object itself. Since this is a confusion brought about by the influence of egocentrism, it begins to diminish about the same time, i.e. about the age of 7-8.

Secondly there is confusion between that which is internal and that which is external. Names, for example, are in the head, in the surrounding air, or in the object itself.

Thirdly there is confusion between thought and matter. At about the age of 9-10 a child is capable of distinguishing between internal and external which, in turn, gives rise to a child being able to separate matter and thought. This generally occurs after the age of 11.²⁰ It can be understood, then, that a primary child is still realistic to the point where these three varieties of

²⁰Ibid., p.121.

realism cause great confusion between matter and thought.

The understanding of the physical world of the child most assuredly lies in his ability to understand the difference between objects. He is most aware of those things in which he is instinctively interested, or those properties which he hears most often. For example, a noise is loud or not so loud; an object is big while another may be small. The more relationships that can be given to a name apart from their actual context, the more mental advance there is in the child. It would seem, however, that abstraction is fairly well beyond the grasp of a primary child since the idea which he has cannot be separated from the concrete. Thus it is primarily by the association of actions and phrases that a child can be taught to understand what is meant by putting things away neatly, or washing oneself thoroughly. Hence the child's ego-centrism and nominal realism present no small an obstacle to the school beginner's efforts to read;

To name an object is a passion with them, for it is to put their own mark upon it. From the talk which most children hear and use to book language is again an immense step. Words "live" only in the ear and mouth and are pale and corpse-like when addressed to the eye.²¹

²¹G. Stanley Hall, The Contents of Children's Minds on Entering School (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1893), p.32.

CHAPTER 4

EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENT

General View

Any discussion of environment may give rise to mixed feelings between the strong adherents of environment and the equally strong adherents of heredity. For those who can dismiss a bias towards either side, stimuli for human behavior can arise from one or both aspects.

Dismissing, for present purposes, any influence of the factor of heredity, it is possible to admit that a relatively large part of a child's conduct is a direct result of environment.¹ In general terms, environment is the sum total of all the external forces which influence an individual. These not only include his physical surroundings, but also other individuals, objects and ideas. Not fixed by any changeless code of laws, environment is the result of emerging patterns of action and thought which have taken place over a long period of time. Man, by virtue of his intellect, is quite capable of changing his

¹It is possible in the sense that it can be done without falling into the extreme point of view of Watson and other Behaviorists, who claim that man is nothing more than a highly organized animal whose conduct is moulded predominately by his environment.

environment within reasonable limits. In this respect he is superior to his environment. This same faculty does not lie within the power of the primary child, however. He, above all other individuals, does not change, but rather he reflects the environment of an area, the pattern of which has been set by the adult population. This reflection takes diverse forms, both material and immaterial. The adults' attitudes and habits of religion, citizenship, cleanliness, amusements, tolerance, respect, diligence, etc., are all transposed to the child who carries them with him wherever he goes. The extent to which he is affected is, of course, dependent upon the source from which he was influenced. If such sources originated in the home, then the impact of personal-social development is greatest. Other sources become stronger as the child advances in age. At the primary stage, however, influences outside of the home and its immediate vicinity do not have the significant effect that will occur later at the elementary level.²

Physical Environment

A close association exists between an organism and environment.³ Man is an organism in the same sense that an insect is an

²Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.56.

³Piaget, Physical Causality, p.239.

organism, although on a vastly higher plane. Like any organism, man is affected by many stimuli which act not on one, but upon a number of the senses. A bonfire, for example, can stimulate the senses of touch, smell, hearing and sight. It may also arouse such senses as pleasure, despair, or pain. This is an external stimulus. Besides external, a stimulus may also be internal so that an effect is felt from something that takes place from within the body. Thus a dry throat can result from the desire to have a drink.

A child is affected by his physical environment from the very moment of his conception. During his prenatal months he is given the protective shelter of his mother's womb. Here, his immediate environment may produce good or bad results. Certainly he is protected from the influences of the exterior world, but his own surrounding environment is ripe with dangers. Should this environment be of the wrong type, then undue pressure could cause malformation. A mother who is negligent and eats the wrong type of food, or who is in a poor state of health, or who is an alcoholic, may pass on to her child the results of her weakness. Once born, the child receives a greater share of environmental influences. Good nutrition and proper care affect his development. In this respect economic factors play an important role. If the child's surroundings are good, then he develops an assurance and poise which are conducive to good development. Poverty, on the other hand, has the unpleasant effect of creating depression, and

the happy, carefree atmosphere which is so necessary for good development is removed from the child. Poor housing conditions usually go hand in hand with economic hardship. Where such conditions are severe, there is produced a group of children who are likened to quasi-adults from whom all vestiges of childhood have been removed. This is particularly applicable to situations where such conditions are accompanied by parental neglect. In other instances it is possible, through close family relationship, to use poverty as a springboard whereby the higher virtues may be attained.⁴

While poverty can create tremendous disturbances within a child, equal, if not more critical, disturbances can be fostered by the opposite extreme. There is no exaggeration in saying that the lives of many potentially great men and women have been wasted because of too much wealth. Like poverty, wealth, properly used, may be the instrument of greater achievements. If abused, it leads to cruelty, selfishness and arrogance.

Geographical Environment

Just what effect geographical environment has on the individual is difficult to determine. Each country, regardless of climate or locality, seems to produce its share of great men. A

⁴Ross, Fundamental Sociology, p.49.

more evident difference may be noted if the idea of geographical environment is limited to urban and rural areas. In this respect some interesting facts were derived from the study of children from both the city and the country by G. Stanley Hall.⁵ While some difference was accredited to other factors, such as curriculum, rather than geographical environment,⁶ a distinctly separate set of concepts was noted between city and country children, especially with regard to language and attitudes. It is worthy of note that when Hall published his findings, he found that among city children "the subject matter of primers . . . is in great part still traditionally of country life."⁷ The primary readers of today still retain this country atmosphere to a fairly large extent. On the whole, country life has greater educational value in that city life does not permit the natural freedom which the child finds so necessary; "As our methods of teaching grow natural we realize that those who grow up without knowing the country are defrauded of that without which childhood can never be complete or normal."⁸

⁵Hall, The Contents of Children's Minds. His ideas concerning the two are mentioned at intervals throughout the treatise.

⁶Ibid., p.4.

⁷Ibid., p.28.

⁸Ibid.

The country, while it promotes certain qualities of character, lacks the environmental factors which give to the child that keen perception of human nature which is so readily found in city children;

The country child has more solitude, is likely to develop more independence, and is less likely to be prematurely caught up into the absorbing activities and throbbing passions of manhood, and becomes more familiar with the experiences of primitive man. The city child knows a little of many more things, and so is more liable to superficiality, and has a wider field of error. At the same time it has two great advantages over the country child, in knowing more of human nature and in entering school with a much better developed sense of rhythm, and all its important implications.⁹

Social Environment

Every child born, is born into a specific cultural background, and he is eventually conditioned to the demands of that culture. Both personality and behavior are conditioned by culture since the latter dictates what is expected of the child in any given environment. A child brought up in a refined home will not generally become a ruffian, nor will a child raised among a group of ruffians likely be refined. Everyone is influenced by the group to which he belongs. This fact gives rise to such wise sayings as: "Show me your friends and I'll tell you what you are," or "Birds of a feather flock together."

To a limited extent, the primary child is influenced by

⁹Ibid., p.30.

his companions, but for the most part he is dominated by the environment of his home. Every so often a child of 5 or 6 years of age has mannerisms and attitudes that bear a striking similarity to that of his parents. Family influence has, of course, a most important influence on individuals of all ages. When we consider that some adults still bear the fruit of their home environment, even though they may have been removed from it for many years, it can be understood how powerful the influence of family life can be to a school beginner. It is during childhood that the mind is most impressionable, and when training is most effective. If good habits are formed at home where an atmosphere of love, kindness, and family solidarity prevail, then the good qualities of a child will develop, despite his defects or inclinations towards evil. But, just as this is true, so also is the opposite. Where there is indifference, lack of restraint, and vice, the bad qualities of the child will be nurtured, and his social environment will be one of ill effect upon him.¹⁰ Thus the shy, secretive, immature, introverted, pouting child, as well as the child who is a show off, who screams, who is unco-operative, boisterous, and who has temper tantrums, may all be reflecting parental influence;

The psychology of a child is determined by his maturity and by his experience. The experience in turn is determined by his maturity as well as by the culture in which

¹⁰Ross, Fundamental Sociology, pp.55-56.

he lives. The variations both in child and culture are, of course, enormous.¹¹

Environment and Intelligence

What has been said up to this point about environment is an attempt to indicate that environment does have a decided effect upon the physical development of the child, his moral interpretation of actions, his habits, attitudes, and personality in general. If this idea of the effect of environment is extended to intelligence, however, then the results are not so obvious.

Concerning intelligence itself, Ruch says:

Intelligence, as used by the psychologists, includes all those abilities through which we acquire, retain, extend, and apply our knowledge. Thus intelligence comes to include perception, memory, imagination, judgement, and learning. In other words, a person's intelligence is his capacity to adjust to new situations for which he has at his disposal no ready-made, previously practiced response, by making use of what he has learned in the past.¹²

There is little doubt that man, in early times, was extremely crude. Despite his low beginnings, however, he was a man and, as such, possessed an intellect and will. There is evidence of this intelligence in man shown in the early drawings and paintings which he left behind him. Also, he developed a language, a feat which no

¹¹Gesell and Ilg, The Child from Five to Ten, p.61.

¹²Floyd L. Ruch, Psychology and Life (new ed., New York: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1941), pp.471-472.

other animal in creation has succeeded in accomplishing. Even humans who are both deaf and dumb have succeeded in communicating their ideas to others. Speech is thus founded in the powers of the intellect and developed through usage. The intellectual power of a person may also develop from being in contact with other intellects. This does not mean that the intellect itself has developed, but there has been a development of the mind through its contact with the progressive concrete wisdom of mankind.¹³

When a child is born, he, like all other humans before him, possesses an intellect and a will. It is not until much later in life that these reach full exercise. In the interim, even an intelligent child can be dulled by surroundings of poverty and disease, or by a lack of intellectual stimulus. But these things more or less hamper what we might call the results of intelligence, and not really the intelligence itself. There is little conclusive evidence that environment has any profound effect upon intelligence. What study has been done in this regard has been through experiments carried on to determine a change in the I.Q. of individuals. In particular, these experiments were concerned with co-twin studies and other tests of control groups.¹⁴ In all cases

¹³Ross, Fundamental Sociology, p.100.

¹⁴Ruch, Psychology and Life, pp.497-504.

the change in I.Q. has been relatively small. The conclusion reached was "that the I.Q. can be changed to some extent by environment, but still retains a high degree of constancy even when environment is markedly changed."¹⁵

¹⁵Ruch, Psychology and Life, p.504.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROLE OF THE PRIMARY TEACHER

If a child's healthy outlook on school life, as well as his ability to master the intricacies of the elementary grades, is largely dependent upon the training he receives in primary, then the role of the primary teacher is a most unenviable one. The knowledge that the faith, simplicity, and willingness to learn, of even one child, can be seriously mutated by unskilled hands, is the concern of any teacher. The knowledge that such mutation can take place before the child really starts, however, is truly frightening. The successful primary teacher may be said to possess three important attributes; a knowledge of the behavior patterns of her children, emotional stability, and a sense of humour.

Knowledge of Behavior Patterns

By the very nature of his ego-centricity of language and thought, a child in grade primary or grade one would appear incapable of adapting himself to too much formalism. At about the age of 6 a child is somewhat divided with regard to his ego and the world. He begins to emerge, as it were, in his outlook of others and of things apart from himself. He is still ego-centric

but at the same time he takes an interest in his school work.¹ As he passes through his sixth year and into his seventh, his ego begins to diminish, and he observes others more objectively. He starts to take his place in the world. Because of this change, the child is awakened to situations through which he may previously have passed, but which suddenly become quite new;

As adults we scarcely appreciate how much a 7-year-old still has to learn - not in factual knowledge, but in comprehension of the meanings of the manifold life situations which impinge upon him at home and at school.²

As such, the 7-year-old is very readily misunderstood and often imposed upon, and so "the second grade is peculiarly in need of sensitive and perceptive teachers."³

The imagination of the child cannot bear perfunctory instruction. He lives fully, loves completely, and talks incessantly. He is bursting with imagination and questions. Effusive in his affection, he takes everything to himself;⁴

Fortunate are those children who are entrusted to a teacher capable of interpreting their ebullitions as symptoms of a growth process which needs skillful direction. Such a teacher creates in her schoolroom a cheerful atmosphere

¹Gesell and Ilg, The Child from Five to Ten, p.428.

²Ibid., p.132.

³Ibid., p.134.

⁴Gesell and Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education, p.306.

of tolerance and security which is hospitable to a certain dramatic quality in the 6 year old.⁵

The teacher, on the other hand, who fails to take the effusiveness of childhood into consideration, and who burdens them with well-meaning rules and regulations, leaves herself open to sometimes violent opposition. One cannot expect a child to leave the relative freedom of his pre-school days and immediately adjust to a wave of self-control.⁶ The ability to interpret the intellectual, ethical, and emotional behavior of children, as well as the ability to appeal to their aesthetic sense, would seem to require a most perceptive and skilled teacher;

If a teacher is too exacting in her demands for perfection in any form of aesthetic creation, she will largely defeat the whole purpose of the program. Children are likely to be crude in their early art products, heavy and unsteady in line, poor in perspective, incongruous in relationship, unconventional in motif. The teacher will need to beware lest, in criticizing or disparaging the spontaneous aesthetic products of her children, she turn the young edge of their interest. She ought never to lose sight of the fact that these products represent the present conceptions of her children and afford them pleasurable means of objectifying both experience and fancy. Through manifested interest in their often crude efforts, through delicate suggestion, through unfailing encouragement, through frequent praise and commendation, it must be her function to stimulate everyone of her pupils to externalize his inner world of ideas freely and often in the various media of aesthetic expression.⁷

⁵Gesell and Ilg, The Child from Five to Ten, p.94.

⁶Gesell and Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education, p.253.

⁷Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.252.

Emotional Stability

There is little doubt that children work better and develop more easily with a teacher whom they like and respect. Her attitudes are reflected by her own words and actions, and they affect the children in proportion to her relationships with each individual child under her care.⁸ Not only do children learn from her, but she learns even more from them;

Just in proportion as teachers do this do they cease to be merely mechanical, and acquire interest, perhaps enthusiasm, and surely an all-compensating sense of growth, in their work and life.⁹

A teacher who fails to learn from her pupils runs the hazard of becoming aloof, dominating, irritating, haphazard, or indifferent. The attitudes she possesses are contagious and are quite easily passed on to the children.¹⁰ It behooves the primary teacher to remember that she is "in all conscience and beyond everything else, a shaper of attitudes and a creator of values."¹¹

The teacher who is emotionally immature will most likely develop the same traits in the children. This immaturity is

⁸Millard, Child Growth and Development, p.247.

⁹Hall, The Contents of Children's Minds, p.26.

¹⁰Millard, Child Growth and Development, p.248.

¹¹Averill, The Elementary School Child, p.58.

characterized by a failure to understand the motives behind the actions of children because of the teacher's own inability to resolve her personal-social development. The proper development of opportunities in children hinges to a large extent upon the poise and emotional maturity of the teacher.¹²

Sense of Humour

Emotions are responses to concrete situations, and the emotional patterns are displayed by the individual in every part of his social environment. Humour, as an emotional trait, is as basic to the individual as is anger, fear, or crying.

There is very little in the school curriculum which cannot express humour in some manner or another. Teaching can be frustrating enough at times without antagonizing it further by the adoption of a cheerless attitude. Humour was undoubtedly created by God to prevent the whole of mankind from going insane;

Humor has two sides, the critical and the kindly. The critical aspect of humor keeps us from being sentimental, and the kindly aspect of humor keeps us from being cynical. When these two aspects are combined, they tend to keep us sane. And sanity is the keynote of humor. Indeed, the essence of humor is the sanity of sanities.¹³

There are grades of humour, of course, and not one bit of

¹²Millard, Child Growth and Development, p.248.

¹³Julius Gordon, Your Sense of Humor (New York: Didier Publishers, 1950), p.7.

it can be taught outright. Its ways are subtle and must be cultivated by practice and example. Children in the primary grades have a priceless sense of humour. The teacher who realizes this, and who has developed a sense of humour of her own, possesses a combination which at once keeps her from conventionality and inflexibility.¹⁴ Humour is not something to be adopted by the teacher as a shallow attempt to impress the children with her congeniality. It should be honestly acquired as a necessary qualification for the job to be done, for "a sense of humor is not merely an ornamental trimming. It is an integral part of the very fabric of life."¹⁵ Gesell very poignantly described humour when he said; "Humour is one of the most valuable and beneficial traits in human nature. In its highest forms it means sympathy, insight, philosophy, originality."¹⁶ The teacher who possesses it is rich indeed, for not only does it indicate a lack of self-importance within herself, but it shows her emotional stability and a fine sense of balance in human relations.¹⁷

¹⁴ Gesell and Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education, p.307.

¹⁵ Gordon, Your Sense of Humor, p.8.

¹⁶ Gesell and Gesell, The Normal Child and Primary Education, p.135.

¹⁷ Gordon, Your Sense of Humor, p.12.

CONCLUSION

Many of the primary child's concepts are motivated by the habits and attitudes which he acquires from his home, his community, his playmates, and his school. These habits and attitudes may be good, bad, or indifferent, depending upon the environment in which they are fostered.

Despite his habits and attitudes, the child is broadly limited in his concepts by the ego-centricity of his nature. His language and thought are highly personal and self-centered. He talks in order to fulfill a desire for self-satisfaction, and the subjectivity of his language does not consider the feelings or opinions of others. His thoughts revolve about his own experiences, which help to fashion his reason.

The processes by which the child's reason and idea of reality evolve, are quite similar. This similarity is particularly noticeable in the confusion with himself, with others, and with the external world. This confusion is brought about by the domination of his own views and his subjective adherences. Later, as the child realizes that his thoughts and idea of reality are not in conformity with those of other people, he makes an effort to adapt himself to their point of view.

The success with which this adaption takes place depends partly upon the child's environment, because the environment both changes the child and is changed by him in turn. The conditions of mind in a child between the ages of 5-8 make him a highly complex organism. For this reason he needs not only understanding parents, but also keen, perceptive teachers - teachers who can understand him for what he is, make allowances for his incapacabilities, and so cultivate him accordingly.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anable, Raymond J. Philosophical Psychology. New York: Fordham University Press, 1941.
- Annual Report of the Superintendent of Education for Nova Scotia 1932-1933.
- Averill, Lawrence A. The Psychology of the Elementary School Child. New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1949.
- Biber, Barbara, et al. Life and Ways of the Seven-to-Eight Year Old. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1942.
- Bühler, Karl. The Mental Development of the Child. trans. Oscar Oeser. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1930.
- Cunningham, William F. The Pivotal Problems of Education. New York: Macmillan Co., 1940.
- Dewey, John. The Child and the Curriculum and The School and Society. Chicago: Phoenix Books, University of Chicago Press, n.d.
- Gesell, Arnold, and Gesell, Beatrice Chandler. The Normal Child and Primary Education. New York: Ginn and Co., 1912.
- Gesell, Arnold, and Ilg, Frances L. The Child from Five to Ten. 4th ed. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1946.
- Gesell, Arnold, and Ilg, Frances L. Infant and Child in the Culture of Today. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1943.
- Gordon, Julius. Your Sense of Humor. New York: Didier, Publishers, 1950.
- Hall, G. Stanley. The Contents of Children's Minds on Entering School. New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1893.
- James, William. "Ethical Implications of the Law of Habit," Readings in Ethics. Edited by J. F. Leibell. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1926.

- Millard, Cecil V. Child Growth and Development in the Elementary School Years. Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1951.
- Piaget, Jean, and Inhelder, Bärbel. The Child's Conception of Space. trans. F. J. Langdon and J. L. Lunzer. New York: Humanities Press, Inc., 1956.
- Piaget, Jean. Judgement and Reasoning in the Child. trans. Marjorie Gabain. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1928.
- _____ . The Child's Conception of Number. trans. G. Gattegno and F. M. Hodgson. New York: Humanities Press, Inc., 1952.
- _____ . The Child's Conception of Physical Causality. trans. Marjorie Gabain. New York: Humanities Press, Inc., 1951.
- _____ . The Language and Thought of the Child. trans. Marjorie Gabain. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc., 1926.
- _____ . The Child's Conception of the World. trans. Joan and Andrew Tomilson. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1951.
- Ross, E. J. Fundamental Sociology. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1939.
- Watts, A. F. The Language and Mental Development of Children. Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1948.
- The Works of Plato. Translated with analyses and introductions by Benjamin Jowett. New York: Tudor Publishing Co., n.d.