

Early Childhood Airs Its Views_____

HELEN G. TRAGER and MARIAN RADKE

With the comparatively recent realization that early childhood is not as carefree as our hazy remembrances of it, we question ourselves as to how much and how early children feel the conflicts which certainly exist in American society today. Through children's statements we gain insight into their particular struggle for adjustment in society as they are reported by Helen G. Trager, director, Age Level Studies of the Bureau for Intercultural Education, and Marian Radke of the Research Center for Group Dynamics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.¹ To educators reading the statements, the implications for planning are, we believe, inescapable.

NOT SO LONG AGO most of us were comfortably sentimental or nostalgically unrealistic about childhood. Not until the psychologists, analysts, and child study experts documented their thesis that childhood is fraught with frustration, inhibition, and trauma did we, unwillingly, relinquish our favorite myth that the early years are the happy, care-free years.

In spite of the current rash of "psychological" movies and novels and the fact that Freudian vocabulary is part of the average person's speech, the general public is ignorant of what childhood is really like. Hollywood's version of the stage success, *Lady in the Dark*, with glamorous Ginger Rogers, came off well in box office terms but didn't challenge the adult audience too seriously. They laughed and wept through it and similar pictures like *Spellbound*, aware momentarily of the effect of childhood guilt feelings on the adult

psyche, but once outside the theater their own wistful memories of childhood returned.

The average classroom teacher, too, is wistful about childhood. In addition, her professional training has discouraged concern and "interference" with the life problems of the children; so she sticks to the three R's. The child study movement, in contrast, led by the Sidonie Gruenbergs on the parent education level and by the Daniel Prescotts on the teacher education level, continuously stimulates the study of young children and their human needs. Their efforts have helped to move us along to some awareness of social and emotional problems as they affect the educative process. But we still have a long way to go.

At What Age Comes Conflict Awareness?

Conflict in the world all about us—among nations; among religious, racial, and nationality groups; between man-

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agement and labor; between old stock American and foreign born—raises many problems. *Does all this affect children? How? How badly are they infected with the hate virus? Where does it start? Can the school do anything about it?* These and many other questions are the concern of groups throughout the country working with children and adults in schools and in social science research laboratories. Intercultural educators say that the schools *can* teach democratic living if they are willing to work at it.

In schools where intercultural education is a concern, most energy and effort have been directed at older children whose behavior overtly or covertly has anti-democratic earmarks. This tendency to give attention to the older children only is no accident. It is a result of general assumptions commonly held:

That the young child's world is circumscribed by his family, his toys, games, pets, and friends and that he is without social sensitivity. (Primers, beginning readers, to-be-read-to stories, all repeat the overly simple a,b,c, theme of human and animal life in a static, unreal world.)

That little children are unaware of group differences, have no concept of group, and have no particular feelings about group membership.

That young children catch prejudice in the middle years (nine-ten-eleven) but come to school at five and six (with minds like clean slates) accepting and friendly toward all people.

Data gathered by teachers of kindergarten and first grade children challenge the above assumptions. Through observations in the classroom and playground in systematic recording of

partner choices, sociograms, anecdotes, and conflict incidents, we have a clearer notion of how young children are affected by the social conflicts in the world in which they live. Accounts of conversations and actions of children taken from classroom anecdotal records lead us to conclude that young children—

are aware of group differences, know about specific religious practices, hold fixed notions, generalize and think in group stereotypes

are affected by social conflict in the world

are affected by family marital problems in the home

reject and know how it feels to be rejected because of group membership.

Group Differences

Young children are aware of group differences. Awareness is often limited. It may or may not carry with it emotional overtones.

Adele, Alberta, and Jennie quilt two identical block churches. Adele: "Mine's a Catholic Church."

Alberta: "Mine's a Public Church."

George: "I go to Public Church, too."

Jennie: "What kind of church?"

Alberta: "Public Church is like Protestant Church."

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Joseph, referring back to yesterday's conversation: "I'm Polish. My mother says never to forget it."

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Johnny, helping pull off Louis' leggings with him: "A man called my father a goy."

Louis: "What's goy?"

Johnny: "I think everybody around here is a goy. But not me. I'm Jewish."

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On the way over to visit a Baptist church, Alec, excitedly, eyes glowing: "I don't know how it feels in a Jewish Church."

While mother is preparing dinner, Alice: "Mommy, do Catholics, Jewish, Protestants all go to your school?" (Mother teaches.)

Mother: "Yes, why?"

Alice: "I just wanted to know."

Child, looking through school stairway window: "See that? That's my church. Not the big one you see. There's a little one next to it. You can't see it. All us Lutherans go there."

Labels

With young children, evidence also indicates that specific group labeling appears repeatedly in conflict situations.

"I was in an accident. A dirty wop from Jersey went into us. The man who's teaching my father how to drive hurt his hand."

Allen, listening wide-eyed while Carl told us about a boy being arrested for fighting: "Was he white or colored?"

During indoor recess, Martha: "Albert and his brother went to the ball game and two colored boys beat them up. They cut their heads all up and they had to go to the hospital 'n everything." Teacher: "Why did they do it. Do you know?"

Martha: "Ha! You're asking me. I don't know."

To teacher during outdoor recess: "You know that Chinese boy? He knocked me down."

(The "Chinese" boy is a Filipino who was tormented at the beginning of the year because the children thought he looked like a Japanese.)

Carl: "We was playing Chinese Stoopin' Tag. A colored kid bothered us, the

same one, we don't like him. We don't let him play. So he gets mad and jumps on our feet."

Religion

Even in early childhood specific religious practices are already part of experience.

Mike, watching the teacher buttering crackers: "Sunday I'm going to church. I'm going to have wine and crackers. For my c—c—" (stutteringly).

Teacher: "Your first communion."

Alice: "I just joined the Protestant Church Sunday."

Mike (ready to eat): "Let's say Grace!"

Susan: "Grace!"

Later the same day—getting in line, Alice: "I was scared. Church is scary."

Pat, coming to teacher during "creative work" period: "Do you go to church on Sunday? Betty is making a picture of you. If you go to church she has to make a hat on you."

Betty, joining in: "We're going to the Catholic Church, that's Joan's church."

Pat: "You have to wear a hat."

Margaret, during conversation period, taking a deep breath: "And you know what now? I go to Hebrew School. Every day after school I go, but sometimes not. I don't learn to read yet because we're too little. But we gotta go anyway to learn how to be with Jewish people."

In talking to teacher before school: "Johnny boy has to come to Protestant school. Catholic schools haven't got a kindergarten. Johnny's all Catholic. Even his father and mother!"

James, showing children a small crucifix: "My sister got this in Church. She's all Catholic now. We used to be only half and half."

(Children laugh.)

James: "It ain't funny."

Bobby, joining church discussion: "My daddy is an usher in the Baptist Church. And my mommy was baptized."

There are some children, of course, who are not clear about the group to which they belong. For instance:

Tom, building with some sticks: "Come see the church I made. Where I go on Sunday. It's a Catholic Church."

Peggy: "Are you Catholic?"

Tom: "No, I go to St. Ed's." (St. Edwards is a Catholic Church.)

And still others make of religion an intimate part of life and play.

Elliott, pointing out various features of his block building and explaining: "This is a Protestant Church, but I'm a Catholic. This is Jesus' chair and this is the Lord's bed."

Victor: "The Lord and Jesus are the same."

Elliott: "All right, then this is Jesus' bed, too. And these are candles around His bed so He won't be afraid at night. And here's His bathtub. And here's His sink and stove to cook. This church is really for the king, and his maids. But they dress like the king and they make the Lord Jesus' bed. And the Lord Jesus came in but my aunt won't let me go there so I didn't see Him. When church was over the Lord Jesus got out of bed and dressed and went out for a walk by Himself. He saw a man and He asked him to go for a walk in the park. He said, 'No, I have to go to the Protestant Church now.' And that's the end."

Stereotyping

Children hold fixed notions of other groups, generalize, and think in stereotypes. Some stereotypes are more harmful than others, all are basically unsound, yet are accepted by their elders. Can the school, through facts and broadening experiences, substitute objectivity and sound thinking? Can par-

ents and teachers help children to see difference without rejecting it?

Elaine, showing costume doll to the class: "This is a Spanish doll."

Teacher: "How can you tell she's Spanish?"

Tommy: "'Cause she's fat."

Dorothy, helping teacher to fold curtains: "I'm working for you. I'm like a maid."

Elinor, passing and overhearing: "You're not a colored maid."

Donald, at story telling time: "This one is about Superman's uncle. He's a Nazi soldier."

James: "Oh, goody!"

Donald: "Why do you say 'goody?' Germans are no good."

Howard, arriving one morning accompanied by his sister and her friend: "A big colored kid hits me every morning. When I come to school he won't let me in."

Sister: "We were going to get a gang after him. But he's got a colored gang."

Howard: "Colored gangs are strong."

George, laughing, as class was reviewing nursery rhymes and looking at the pictures together: "There's that Old King Cole again. He's rich, that's why he's so fat."

On being called "white cracker" by a Negro boy in the class, the teacher asked the neighboring teacher its meaning. That teacher asked her class: "I am puzzled by the meaning of two words. Do you know what 'white cracker' means?"

A number of answers were received from the children: "You're supposed to say it when you're mad." "It means, a cracker is white and so are you." "If you are colored then you say ginger snap." "Or chocolate drop." "Or ginger cracker."

John, coming into room slowly: "I didn't get to New York. Do you know why? My mother was afraid on account there's a strike, because niggers throw bricks and they stop the trains, and they might hurt you."

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The children were watching the dentist bring in his equipment to set up an office.

Betty: "Only Protestant schools have dentists, don't they?"

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In talking to teacher before school: "Helen's brother goes to my church. All good people go to my church."

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"My cousin threw the ball and broke a window. He wasn't afraid. Just went in and told them to put in a new one. He's a Catholic. He ain't afraid of no one."

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Harvey, showing water color picture to teacher: "See the church I made."

Teacher: "Who goes to that church?"

Harvey: "A priest."

Teacher: "What kind of church is it?"

Harvey: "Catholic."

Teacher: "Is that the kind you go to?"

Harvey: "No, I go to an American church."

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Audrey: "I have to go to the dentist and I'm sca-a-a-red."

Mary: "You don't have to be scared, Audrey! He's an American, too."

• • •

Jimmy, telling a long yarn about a man in his dream: "Soon he came to see some Indians." (Children laugh and giggle.) "Then he went to the Japs." (Children solemn, "oh! oh!") "Then he saw some good Americans." (Children clap, stamp their feet; one or two shout "hurrah! hurrah!")

Interesting insights into the way the popular *Little Black Sambo* story suggests and perpetuates undesirable stereo-

types about the Negro can be seen in the following:

John (white): "The teacher told us the gingerbread boy and Black Sambo. I like Black Sambo best. He's funny." (In the story Black Sambo isn't funny.)

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Peter (Negro), bringing a book from the class library: "Here's a good story—it's *Black Sambo*."

Lewis (white): "That's a good story."

Tommy (white), coming close to Peter, smiling and pointing to him: "And you're Black Sambo!"

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Child, showing the teacher two pictures of houses he had made: "This house belongs to the gingerbread boy. It's bigger and prettier than Black Sambo's house."

Conflict

The young child is affected by the social conflict all about him. He is conscious of social and economic problems; is aware of class distinctions.

Child, to the teacher: "Some kid's mother went to the hospital and his father'd got to go back to the Army (pause)—some kids have it tough."

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Warren, walking with teacher around school-yard during recess, stopping to wave to some "house-bound" children across the street. Counting: "Two in this window. Two in that window. Four! Holy Cow! Who takes care of them all? That mother has some job!"

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Child, showing teacher a "block train": "This train has boxes of money for poor people. A man had a leg broken by a train wheel. It cut him. This money is for him."

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Jean opened the dressing room door, looked around to see if she was being observed, threw her hat and coat on the floor and pulled the door shut. When the teacher insisted that she

hang up her things: "I don't care if I spoil them—I got lots of others, we're rich." Then, reluctantly complying: "Gee, I wish I were big and had a maid to wait on me."

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Several children were discussing the fact that Steve was wearing overalls in school.

Ann: "I wear overalls when it's cold."

Jane: "You're not supposed to wear overalls in school."

Donald: "He's poor!"

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As children formed a line, Howie turned and with the flat of his hand pushed Kenny back. Then, wrinkling his nose with disgust: "I don't want him near me. He's got no buttons on his shirt nor nothin'—only pins, pins—"

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While building a long train with benches and chairs: "We're making a train to get food to poor people."

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When the teacher and class walked to the park, they passed the bakery shop.

Amy: "We are getting black bread because we have to feed the other side."

Larry: "I don't want to feed the other side. Hitler hates the Jews, he kills them."

Billy: "The war is over."

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Dotty, telling an original story: "She was beautiful and rich. She had lovely clothes. She was like a movie star. She had lovely, lovely clothes. She was me when I'm big."

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Joan, during discussion following the story of *Fisherman and His Wife* and looking at the pictures of shack, cottage, mansion, and castle: "Poor people live in shacks."

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Just chatting: "My family is happy now. My mother got a pretty flower dress for Easter. When we get more money, Mary and I gonna get one, too."

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Carol, chatting before school: "Rose is

sick. She'll never get well. She won't eat. I take my papers to her and she puts them all around her room."

Teacher: "Do you visit her?"

Carol: "No-o, she's only the maid!"

Parents' beliefs

The child begins early to adopt his parent's philosophy and general outlook on life, his parent's beliefs and behavior.

George, to friend: "You have to pay for living. You have to pay for dying. My father says you gotta pay for everything."

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Harry, to his former teacher: "I don't do lessons at night anymore. My daddy teaches me how to box—so I can beat up niggers that try to take my lunch."

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Jimmy (Negro): "My mother won't let me play with him. She don't like white children."

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Doris (white): "My father's coming home Saturday. He's looking for a house in Baltimore. He says there's a lot of 'colored' there. I don't like 'colored.'"

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Connie, during reading lesson when Baby's name, "Sally," is first introduced: "There's a Sally on my street. She goes to Catholic School. My mother says it's a shame she's a Catholic."

Children's values

Some of the social standards set by parents are rejected by their children.

Mabel (white) and Jackie (Negro) arm in arm approach my desk.

Mabel: "Jackie is my friend. I'm going to visit her every day on 'visiting time.' My mother says why don't I choose white girls."

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Ruth (white) to teacher: "I got two new friends. Sue (Negro) is my friend and Barbara (Negro). My mother don't like colored kids."

Home Relationships

Marital problems, affectional relations, and conflicts at home reflect the turbulence of our time and in turn affect children. They come to school with feelings of aggression, insecurity, rejection, ambivalence. Can the teacher teach—can the children learn—unless this emotional load is reduced? Can we hope to diminish group antagonism without considering as well the individual emotional problems of the child?

During conversation period: "My father took my quarter and wouldn't give it back—he said he spent it for beer. My grandfather took my spyglass. He has two. He just wouldn't give me one. Nobody in my house lets me have anything."

Child, in conversation with teacher as child is on his way out: "I'm going to get hollered at."

Teacher: "Why?"

Child: "This is my new suit."

Teacher: "Has anything happened to it?"

Child "No!"

Teacher: "Then why will you be hollered at?"

Child: "My mother told me to wear it but sometimes if it rains she just hollers."

We had counted the children present and I had marked the number "forty-two" in my roll book, while John wrote "forty-two" on the board.

Howard: "You got a big family."

Joe: "Do we get on your nerves? Our mothers don't want us. We get on their nerves. When we come home we do things and she hollers. She says we

get on her nerves. She don't want us."

George, entering laughing: "My mother is funny. She hollers and hollers—'George!' but she don't mean me. She means my father. She never hollers at us kids."

Chatting while dressing for recess: "Frankie's father has a girl friend. She's a real mean lady. She stole Frankie's father away from Frankie and now my Aunt Anna has no husband and Frankie's father has no real wife."

Gussie said his mother almost "ripped" his report up. He didn't know why. She just almost did. "She's always laying around. She's drunk. That's what my father says. He don't like her—I don't neither."

Just chatting, Marjorie says: "My mother had a heart attack, because she wants a baby. She's in hospital."

Dolly: "She is not, Marjie. She brang you today."

Marjorie: "Well, she went to see a patient."

Dolly: "You only go in hospital if you ain't got no money."

Ronald, telling a story: "My uncle's a cripple. He has to be carried. My father says he oughta be dead."

Children's comments often indicate that retaliatory aggression against parents is sometimes close to the surface.

Child, telling a story: "Sh-sh-sh. This is dirty—sh!" (Looks around for reaction by class but none is noticeable). "So he jumped in a hole full of mud and he likes it." (Giggle.) "My mother says mud is dirty, but it ain't."

Joey made two pictures on a slate depicting (1) "A father beating a boy because he don't play quiet," and (2) "The boy beating his father because he snores too loud."

Jane, telling a story: "A little girl wouldn't do what her mother told her to. So she tattled to her father and he made her go to bed without supper. But she wouldn't sleep, she kept mumblin' 'Want supper. I want supper.' So they told her to 'shut up' and she wouldn't. So they poured ice water on her and her mother said, 'Let me sew the hole in your dress.' She didn't have no needle or nothin'. She always fooled her. And the little girl laid over her knee. And the mother took a cat-o-nine tails and beat her and she didn't have a board in her pants and she couldn't move no more. So they put her in bed and when they fell asleep she poured water over them till they had goose pimples and then she beat them all over with a thick strap until they were dead."

Rejection

When children come to school they often know how it feels to be rejected because of group membership. They also have learned to reject.

During morning work period, Lorraine: "I have to talk Jewish."

Ann (Negro): "Why talk Jewish if you're not Jewish?"

Lorraine, indignantly raising voice: "But I *am* Jewish."

Lily: "Well, my grandmother is Jewish but I don't talk Jewish."

Ann, flippantly: "Well, I'm glad I don't have to talk Jewish."

During discussion about clothing collection, speaking slowly and emphasizing each word with a slight pause: "We gotta make sure none of them Japs git it."

Children were getting into line. One was a very small colored girl, who stood at the front of the line, and Angie said: "But a colored girl can't be first in line."

When extra first grade children visited

the room it necessitated doubling up. There ensued general beckoning and calling of friends to sit with them. One visitor was colored in an otherwise all white group. The colored child hesitated in front of the room, then walked indecisively up the aisle and sat slowly on the edge of George's seat. George edged away, throwing a surly look over his shoulder at the intruder, propped his face in his hands, and looked disgusted. The colored child edged over to Johnnie's seat directly across the aisle. Johnnie looked over at George, giggled, and edged away. The colored child got up, bewildered. Teacher stepped up and motioned him to an empty seat he had overlooked.

Children were taking their "story telling" seats for the first time. Sandra (colored) sat down first. Lucy (colored) quickly hurried over to her. There were many seats empty but John and Albert (both colored) followed suit. They sat very close together and although there was room for another child no one sat down with them.

As children were choosing "partners" for assembly, Joan (Negro) chose Peggy (white). Peggy pulled away—hung back. Joan grabbed her elbow. Peggy pulled back again. Joan walked on without Peggy, looking straight ahead.

After Dave finished telling a story about "Japs," Stevie pointed his finger derisively, leering: "You like Japs. Dave, you like Japs. You're a Jap." Dave, scowling: "No, I don't. You're a Jap." Stevie: "Anyway, you're a Jew."

Anna: "When I was coming out of the dressing room, Peter called me a dirty Jew."

Teacher (aside, a minute later): "Why did you say that, Peter?"

Peter, earnestly: "I didn't say it for spite. I was only playing."

John, boastfully to playmates: "Catholics are better 'n everybody!"

Joe: "Why?"

John: "Catholics learn better."

Some children feel deprived because of their group.

During conversation period: "My father bought two Christmas trees. One for the office and one for Benjy and me. They're only little trees on account of we're Jewish."

What Will You Do?

These are the children next door, across the tracks, on the hill. They are not extraordinary children. They possess no particular qualities or experiences that make them different from millions of others in the kindergartens and early grades of our public schools. Their everyday impressions, wonderings, worries, and convictions pose a problem for education.

Can the Schools Teach International Understanding?

HOWARD R. ANDERSON

The frequency with which the title of this article enters into professional discussions is evidence of general agreement on its importance in educational programs for boys and girls. In the diversity of answers resulting, however, disagreement creeps in. Howard R. Anderson, specialist for social sciences in the Secondary Division of the U. S. Office of Education and member of a commission which studied the social studies program in German schools early in 1947, gives one answer to this question of the moment.

IN DISCUSSING any question it is important to determine carefully what is being considered. In reference to the question stated above many will claim that the schools have long taught international understanding. And in one sense they have. Pupils have read about other lands: their peoples, their ways of living, and their contacts with our country—culturally, economically, politically. Certainly pupils have had occasion to study treaties and alliances, agencies for achieving international cooperation and the techniques of power politics, the piling-up of tensions which

lead to war, and the difficulties of building a satisfying and lasting peace.

But such teaching, alone, cannot achieve the goal sought. That goal is a world in which all peoples (1) know as much as possible about other peoples and why they live as they do, (2) keep informed about problems and issues tending to divide peoples and use their influence to settle those issues in accordance with universal values and through appeals to reason rather than emotion, (3) are sincerely interested in helping other peoples live the good life and are willing to make sacrifices to

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