

## No Discipline Problems for the Teacher?

**NORMAN HALTMEYER\***

**D**URING a recent visit to the Soviet Union, the writer saw a young boy, about 14 years of age, stealing a bouquet of flowers from an elderly, lady flower peddler and running with the stolen bouquet. The lady began to cry and scream at the loss of her flowers; and another young man, who had seen the incident, began to run after the youth. A few minutes later, two men (police), the pursuing young man, and the teen-age flower-lifter returned to the scene of the crime and, following a short discussion and fact-finding inquiry, departed for the police station.

Inquiring about the punishment for this violation, this writer found that the minimum penalty for the teen-age male would be one year in a reform school.

One of the interesting facets of this incident was the young man who felt that it was his civic responsibility to pursue the law offender, and this basic concept permeates throughout Soviet life. While this practice has implications for all Soviet law enforcement, from littering to major crimes, the origin of this behavior centers in the teaching and training process in the public school system.

Soviet teachers seldom participate in solving discipline problems. The procedure for maintaining proper student conduct (the Soviets do not have trouble defining the

term, "proper conduct," as there are rules for conduct) usually takes one of the following steps: (a) peer group help, (b) peer group pressure, (c) reprimand by teacher, (d) removal of the Pioneer tie, and (e) confinement to special schools. (One might comment, "I wish I could send a few to the reform school"; but in the Soviet Union very few cases get past the peer group pressure.)

### Teachers Are the Center

What do Soviet educators expect of students, and how is student participation in regulating conduct practiced?

Most Soviet classrooms are constructed with desks fastened to the floor, all facing the front of the room. Teachers are the center of attention, and teachers demonstrate while students follow. Hard work and numerous (politically organized) cocurricular, after-school activities provided by the Young Octobrists (7 to 10 years of age), Pioneers (10 to 15 years of age), and Komsomols (15 to 28 years of age) hold discipline problems to a minimum.

While many American educators would shudder at the teacher-centered approach, Soviet educators have developed some inter-

\* *Norman Haltmeyer, Chairman, Division of Education, LeTourneau College, Longview, Texas*

esting procedures in encouraging students to help other students and in fostering standard discipline.

Children in Soviet schools are instructed, at the time of their initial exposure to the educational system, that students should assist other students. Educators feel that both the capable student and slow learner benefit from such an experience. Since peer group influence has been shown, through Soviet research, to contribute in shaping the individual, the State can direct the individual into the desired behavioral pattern through a societal encouragement or, if necessary, discipline approach. There is always the influence of armed force which can be used if all other systems fail.

### **A Kind of Involvement**

Most students, according to Soviet educators, gain academically because of this common concern for the needs of the State; the slow learner will work hard not to disappoint his friends, and the capable learner will work hard to improve the total class performance. There is a kind of involvement which works, according to Soviet educators.

While the majority of school rules come from the State and Republics, local students are also allowed to make some of their own rules (by student vote) and encourage both the national and local decisions. The encouragement of rules by students may in-

clude helping a fellow student adjust to State expectations. If "Victor" does not appear to contribute to the improvement of the "Motherland," through motivation, other students observe this behavior and, following the class, one or more students will indicate to "Victor" that it is a disgrace not to complete required work. Or if "Victor" decides to throw a brick through a window, it is the duty of other students to apprehend him and use corrective procedures to change his behavior.

In one case this writer observed a name posted on the bulletin board of a school. Upon asking the reason for this posting, he discovered that the name represented a student who had violated some rule and had rejected prior peer help. The next step was to ask all school students to refrain from looking at, or speaking to, the listed student. Soviet officials reported this peer action usually worked.

If a student does not perform as well as he should, he is told how his poor habits contribute to a detrimental effect upon the group. Soviet educators state that if they are to be successful in overtaking America, every student must contribute his best.

We may feel that peer group discipline is not what we want because of the possibilities of a spy-on-your-neighbor system, but encouragement by fellow students through academic assistance certainly can be beneficial. □

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