

Classroom Socialization: The Other Side of a Two-Way Street

Carl A. Grant

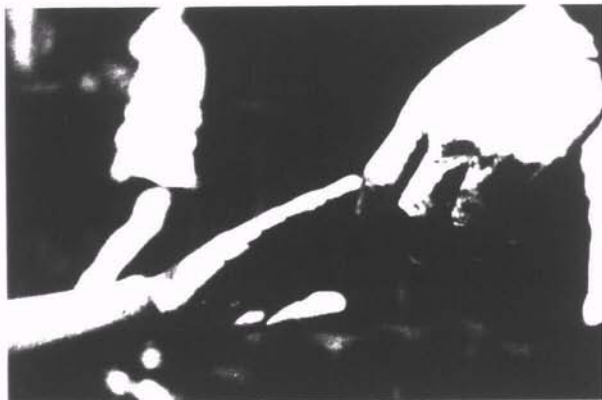


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Teachers and students socialize one another in a reciprocal relationship. They both win—or lose—depending on the teachers' awareness and understanding.

If our schools have failed to adequately socialize children to successfully cope with our complex, multicultural society, perhaps it is because our understanding of the socialization process has been too narrow or inadequate. Researchers have, for the most part, used a unidirectional model to understand the socialization process, but this model provides an incomplete description of what actually occurs.¹ However, Sears, Maccoby, and Levin² observe that the relationship between a mother and child ". . . is not a simple cause-and-effect one. . . . What a child does influences his mother, just as what she does influences him." Many other educators also support this thesis that the child functions as a socializing agent.³ For instance, Bronfenbrenner notes that ". . . in the family, the day-care center, preschool, play group, or school classroom . . . the child influences those

who influence him."⁴

It is naive to believe that we can have successful schools without understanding that the

¹ This paper will sacrifice the investigation of social sources of and influences upon the socialization process that takes place in schools in order to focus attention on the socializing forces inherent in the teacher-student relationship.

² Robert R. Sears, Eleanor E. Maccoby, and Harry Levin. *Patterns of Child Rearing*. Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson, 1957. p. 141.

³ Others scholars also support this view. See, for example: Richard Bell. "A Reinterpretation of the Direction of Effects in Studies of Socialization." *Psychological Review* 75: 81-85; March 1968; Martha L. Fiedler. "Bidirectionality of Influence in Class Interaction." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 67: 735-44; 1975.

⁴ Urie Bronfenbrenner. "A Theoretical Perspective for Research on Human Development." In: Hans Peter Dreitzel, editor. *Childhood and Socialization*. New York: Macmillan, 1973. p. 338.

deliberate and unintentional actions of both teachers and students working in the classroom environment have an effect on each other. The effect is often substantially increased when the teacher and students are of different racial and cultural backgrounds, especially if they have made little effort to understand one another and how they influence one another.

According to the literature, schools try to serve as a primary source of the socialization of the young into the norms of society. Dreeben has written that ". . . schooling helps pupils to learn what the norms are, to accept those norms, and to act according to them."⁵ Both teacher and student are socialized into both deliberate and unintentional roles that are defined according to proscriptive and prescriptive norms. Proscriptive (forbidding certain conduct) and prescriptive (specifying desired conduct) norms, largely related to the order and welfare of the school, emphasize the status relationship between teacher and student⁶ to the neglect of norms that could promote reciprocal student-teacher interaction and respect for diversity.

However, in spite of the attention to the socialization process directed toward these pre-conceived norms, the schools fail to transmit conformity. This failure, however, is not in many ways necessarily bad, because failure to transmit conformity does not deplete the soil of pluralism, which is fertile for social growth and change. Our society needs to promote diversity and creativity in order to maintain its pluralistic composition and in order to have the resources to effectively respond to and direct social change. Zvi Lamm provides an illuminating comment that helps illustrate this point.

Socialization is, on the one hand, essentially a technique for adapting young people to existing social conditions. On the other hand, social conditions may demand innovative rather than conformist behavior. But the school, guided by the idea of socialization, cannot at the same time promote the adaption of its pupils to existing society and their willingness to accept or effect social change. . . . the school cannot maintain a system of instruction that simultaneously promotes both creativity and conformity, both open- and close-mindedness.⁷

Schools cannot meet the goal of a multicultural society that is assumed by this paper, and which is an explicitly stated goal of many school

systems, if they do not keep pace with the changing and growing ambitions and desires of *all* of their clients. A contradiction between the goals of education for a racially and culturally diverse society and the continuing socialization in only middle class ethnocentric norms causes instruction to fail, as evidenced by such things as student rejection of instruction, truancy, poor classroom behavior, and academic disinterest.

To the extent that students influence teachers to change classroom procedures or to justify the value of existing procedures in spite of poor student reception, the reciprocal nature of socialization is demonstrated. In other words, teachers either accept student diversity and modify their teaching accordingly, receiving student appreciation, or they reject differences displayed by students, and cling tenaciously to preconceived standards, thus receiving fewer of the rewards so important to their professional and personal well-being.

For many teachers, the rewards of the profession are "intrinsic" or "psychic" and are tied to "task-related outcomes."⁸ In other words, "students are the primary determinant of how the teacher feels and is made to feel, that her worth as a teacher will be judged by how much her class learns in a given period of time."⁹

Many teachers, in their desire to be rewarded, try to reach their students. This reaching often causes teachers to change or broaden their classroom norms, which in turn requires them to re-examine and make changes in their behaviors and attitudes. Accounts of these changes have been reported, for example, by Kohl¹⁰ and Herndon.¹¹ Brophy and Good cite research that indicates that

⁵ Robert Dreeben. *On What Is Learned in School*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1968. p. 46.

⁶ H. Otto Dahlke. *Values in Culture and Classroom*. New York: Harper & Row, 1958. pp. 228-30.

⁷ Zvi Lamm. *Conflicting Theories of Instruction*. Berkeley, California: McCutchan, 1976. p. 117.

⁸ D. Lortie. *School Teacher*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975. pp. 103-07.

⁹ Seymour B. Sarason. *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971. p. 152.

¹⁰ Herbert Kohl. *36 Children*. New York: Signet, 1968.

¹¹ James Herndon. *The Way It Spozed to Be*. New York: Bantam Books, 1968.

"teacher behavior changes as a function of changes in student behavior."¹²

Examples

One example occurred in a school with a large Hispanic student population. In order to meet the needs of many Hispanic students, the teachers at the school decided to have morning and afternoon announcements in both Spanish and English, and also to send notices home in both languages. Additionally, several of the teachers requested an after school Spanish class for interested faculty members. Over 40 percent of the non-Spanish-speaking faculty members were enrolled in the class, and during the year several teachers began incorporating Spanish vocabulary into their regular class instruction. An example of what can happen when teachers and students do not come to understand one another is provided in a frightening but realistic account of the resocialization of teachers in a central Harlem school.¹³ After only a few days, the teachers forgot their professional purpose was to help children learn. They felt they were in a contest of survival against students. This resulted in part, according to the authors, "from prior race and

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class prejudice, perhaps developed from rumors and media reports of the 'slum school' as a blackboard jungle, but more often it resulted from assorted difficulties with individuals and groups of school children during the teachers' first days on the job. [The] contest mentality also stemmed from children's sense of schooling as a contest in which one could be bored, ashamed, or made to feel inferior."¹⁴ Many of the teachers moved from a more open and idealistic philosophy of teaching to one of rigid authority and control, of drill and

practice. Control, in essence, became their major objective.

In such a situation, both teachers and students are losers. Teachers lose because they do not get the reward of student respect. Students lose because their culture and individual differences are not recognized as legitimate and because they fail to master basic skills in a society in which success requires intellectual competence.

We need to examine the socialization process of both teachers and students and apply the results of the examination to our curriculum and teaching procedures. It should be done in a comprehensive manner, using both traditional and nontraditional methods of research, but teachers should begin immediately to do "action research" in their own classrooms. A few suggestions are offered here to help them get started.

Becoming Aware

As most teachers know, induction into the teaching profession largely relies on "learning-while-doing"; teacher education does not end when one becomes certified.¹⁵ Teachers should be encouraged to see their career growth as continuous, and changes they make in their classroom, especially those related to understanding students, as demonstrating professional sophistication. It is important that teachers continually reexamine their behavior because "in working out a task an individual develops certain beliefs, values, and preferences to the task itself, which over time are generalized to other areas of life."¹⁶ For example, many teachers have found that minority students do not fit their preconceived stereotypes. Finding that individual students differ from one another, they reject stereotypes about minorities, which leads them to question stereotypes in other areas as well. That can lead to a reduction in stereotyping on the basis of sex, age, or handicap.

¹² Jere E. Brophy and Thomas L. Good. *Teacher-Student Relationships*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974. pp. 276-77.

¹³ B. Silverstein and R. Kratochwill. *Children of the Dark Ghetto*. New York: Praeger, 1975. p. 218.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Lacey, *The Socialization of Teachers*.

¹⁶ Dreeben, *On What Is Learned in School*, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

Brophy and Good¹⁷ have suggested three obstacles to teacher awareness about the reciprocal nature of socialization in the classroom. Teachers should be conscious of these obstacles in order to try to overcome them. The first is the rapid pace of the classroom. Jackson reports that teachers sometimes participate in as many as 1,000 interpersonal interchanges each day, and make more than 200 decisions hourly.¹⁸ A school should have provisions for helping teachers analyze the patterns in their interpersonal interchanges and decision making. Students should be encouraged to express their feelings about the quality of the decisions made and the manner in which they are made.

A second barrier is ego defensiveness related to student classroom failure and success. Teachers feel a sense of inadequacy if their students don't succeed and are proud if they do. If teachers were to share the consequences, both failures and successes, of classroom action with students and others, they would increase their opportunity for success and have partnership support. A third barrier is individual differences in teachers' patterns of contact with students. Teachers consciously or unconsciously tend to respond to students as members of groups rather than as individuals. Research evidence indicates that teachers often have different expectations, use a different wait time, give different rewards, and group students differently according to race, sex, and socioeconomic status.¹⁹ Teachers should be helped to discover the extent to which this is occurring. They could get feedback about their own behavior by inviting others to observe their classes or by holding classroom meetings in which students are encouraged to speak their minds. They might also use suggestion boxes, knowing that students may be unwilling to say what they think because they are the weaker partners in the reciprocal relationship.

Overcoming Embarrassment

One of the reasons some teachers have difficulty in working with culturally different students is that they are embarrassed to ask for help. The

teachers who are embarrassed should be encouraged to understand that it is all right to feel uncomfortable about needing help. Sarason says, "No group more than teachers are as aware that the preparation of teachers ill prepares them for the realities of the classroom life."²⁰ There are a number of excellent papers that suggest how to help teachers work in a multicultural setting, so I will not discuss that here. However, I will say it is important to encourage teachers to identify their problems in working with teachers, and to encourage dialogue between them.

Acknowledging and Learning About Student Culture

In order for them to better understand how students influence their behavior it is essential for teachers to be aware of the values, beliefs, and norms that make up student culture as well as student countercultures. Several observers have detected a strong student peer culture in schools that is different from, and frequently at variance with, the goals and values of the school.²¹ Willis notes that "the most basic, obvious and explicit dimension of counter-school culture is entrenched general and personalized opposition to 'authority'."²² Student cultures can influence the way in which students perform academically and socially.

¹⁷ Brophy and Good, *Teacher-Student Relationships*, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-95.

¹⁸ Philip W. Jackson. *Life in Classrooms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968. p. 11.

¹⁹ See, for example: Patricia M. Cunningham. "Teachers Correction Responses to Black-Dialect Miscues Which Are Non-Meaning-Changing." *Reading Research Quarterly* 12:637; Mary Budd Rowe. "Wait-Time and Rewards as Instructional Variables, Their Influence on Language, Logic, and Fate Control: Part One—Wait-Time." *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 11:81.

²⁰ Sarason, *The Culture of School and the Problem of Change*, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

²¹ See, for example: James Coleman. *The Adolescent Society*. New York: Free Press, 1961; P. Cusick. *Inside High School*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973; Willard Waller. *The Sociology of Teaching*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1961.

²² Paul Willis. *Learning to Labor*. Westmead, England: Saxon House, 1977. p. 11.

PEACE OF MIND AT AN EARLY AGE

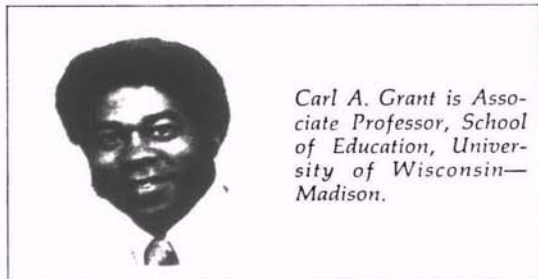
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Many students express boredom, discontent, or mixed feelings about going to school.²³ This boredom can lead students to do nothing or to employ what Goffman calls "impression management," as in the case when a student becomes "a character" in order to manipulate the situation.²⁴ A number of times I have seen minority students act out racial stereotypes they believe teachers have. The teacher becomes more convinced of the accuracy of the stereotype, which in turn influences the teacher's reactions. Once again, stu-



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LETTERS

(Continued from page 453)

knowledge is possible from information like that presented by Bennett. *Educational Leadership* should publish more articles of this tenor and quality.

Geneva Gay
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dents lose, and teachers are unable to break the cycle of nonachievement.

Having academic and social success with students in cooperation with or in spite of the student culture requires an understanding of it. Student culture can be difficult to understand even though teacher and students are members of the same cultural group. When different cultures are involved, it becomes more difficult still—but also more essential.

Not a One-Way Street

The socialization process is not a one-way street. Both teachers and students are affected by one another. If schools are to have greater meaning for students, especially minority students, the reciprocal nature of socialization will have to be recognized and affirmed by both partners in the relationship. That should enable them to better understand and effect social change, instead of becoming victims of the faceless "they" who have too often and too long moved us in the wrong direction.

²³ Jackson, *Life in Classrooms*, op. cit., pp. 39-81.

²⁴ E. Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971. p. 244.

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