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A PROGRAM OF CONTROL IN ONE'S SCHOOL ROOM

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It is difficult to say in a short time all that would be involved in control in a classroom. It involves so many school routines, so many human relationships that to relate how each might be effectively handled would take more time than we have to listen. There are some basic principles however which may guide us in settling up a satisfying group life in our classrooms.

I should like to forget the word, "Discipline," and think of Social Control. Perhaps that may seem like useless quibbling over words yet in my thinking it is the difference between the negative and positive method of handling individuals. It is comparable in this consideration to the difference between the formal and the progressive approach to education.

The first implies domination and dictation; the latter the understanding of child nature, and the fulfillment of modern society's demands on Education. The first type of education is the easy type in terms of preparation and dissemination, with little regard for individual differences and personalities; the second requires deep thinking, intelligent planning, careful preparation in terms of mental and social age levels of the children, -as well as consideration of its usefulness to society.

Likewise with discipline and social control: Discipline implies teacher dominance; social control implies guidance. The first requires little consideration for personalities and training of the individual to live with others; the latter requires understanding child psychology in a social group. Therefore the first is dispensed with quickly and ruthlessly; the latter requires thought and consideration for the situation and the individuals involved.

To achieve Social Control then one must have these understandings of what it is.

Another aspect of social control besides understandings is attitudes. Two major aims of Education are 1. Training individuals for making a living and 2. Assisting in the training of individuals to live with others. The second of these aims sets up the need to teach and require social control.

In order to live satisfactorily with others we must have consideration for others---we must share---we must have respect for orderliness.

School is just another phase of community life. Traits which are essential to satisfactory living in the Community as a whole are essential to living in a classroom. For example, consideration for others includes courtesy, fairness, and tolerance. Sharing includes not only the sharing of materials but time, ideas, accomplishment and achievement. Orderliness includes more than good housekeeping. It can be extended to punctuality, logical thinking, a sense of proportion.

Each one of these traits could still be broken down into its fine points to include all the virtues of a thoroughly social individual.

The attitudes we develop in children in regard to these traits are dependent on our own attitudes toward them, and what our understanding is of their necessity and their functioning in a democratic order. It is essential for us to be fully cognizant of these needs-- then, to hold standards which are sensible but elevating for ourselves and members of the classroom. We need to remember that our mission is Teaching and that teaching may be both direct and indirect.

There is no other socializing agency which has the child for as long a time or under as many different conditions as the schools. No other individual in those agencies is as close to the child as the teacher. She holds the key place in this socializing process. Hers is a great responsibility.

Having mentioned then the need for a full understanding of the child, the aims of education, what Social Control is and what should be the attitude of the schools toward control we perhaps are ready to apply these understandings to the immediate management of the classroom situation.

There are many little techniques and devices employed by good teachers in creating an educative and socializing atmosphere in the classroom. They always are controlled and directed however by these understandings. They make the positive approach to control possible.

First we might consider the teacher who achieves social control in her group. She is vital and alert--two characteristics which may be possessed only by individuals with good health and sufficient rest. These characteristics enable her to meet with poise and patience the many situations created by forty personalities.

Secondly she must possess high standards of conduct within and without the classroom in order to be worthy of the respect of her pupils.

She must be a person emotionally fitted to meet the many exacting different personalities and school days require, and to react objectively and tolerantly toward individual behavior and expressions of personal opinions. Children appreciate fairness, objectivity, and of her qualities of behavior in teachers that teachers require them to exhibit.

Teachers should be human beings not symbols or paragons of perfection, but, without sentimentalizing, I believe that children (and the public in general) require that we be a little above the average as individuals--somewhat akin to their concept of mothers--in deportment, selflessness, high ideals and culture. The illusion is not given by preaching it, but rather in living it--through correct speech, a pleasant cultured speaking voice, fairness, courtesy and impartial dealings with her students.

We hear arguments for and against firmness. Firmness has a definite place. It is demonstrated best by voice and consistency.

The voice is one of the teacher's most effective instruments for control. By the right use of her voice,--the pitch, her inflection, the way she asks for attention, the amount of firmness and sincerity in her voice--she can sway her room to good or poor performance more easily than by any amount of old-fashioned punishment.

An effective device to employ when the room becomes disorderly is to just stop and wait, get the attention of the room, and by proper use of firmness and tone of voice say, "I am waiting" or "I am not going on until all have a chance to hear," etc. It will bring a room to order faster, and build more respect for the teacher than any amount of shouting, scolding, or loss of poise. Reducing one's self to anger only aids in increasing future trouble, for the child soon recognizes our weaknesses, and a certain few will use them to advantage.

The good teacher will anticipate possible child behavior and will set up conditions in her classroom which will minimize chances for breaches of conduct. By careful preparation and planning, the day is made full of interesting and satisfying experiences. An atmosphere of kindly consideration is the only approved one. Through guidance--that is telling the children what they did that was wrong and what would be acceptable behavior--instead of using sarcasm and disrespect for personal feelings--and, through the sharing of pleasures together--an attitude of friendliness and loyalty will be built up.

Then, children feel secure in a room where there is consistency in routine duties and consistency in the teacher's behavior and requirements. A confused child and all its attendant evils can only result from an inconsistent teacher. Well planned routines soon become established and accepted by consistent adherence to them.

I do not think that passing materials a certain way, lining up and waiting for one's turn, raising one's hand or rising to request the teacher's and class's time is old-fashioned, rigid form. It is just learning the best way to do things. It is showing consideration for others, and learning self-control for future years. Many a social failure in life is due to improper training during childhood in unselfishness and respect for others. By consistency, then, we help to establish in the child many valuable traits and attitudes.

Speaking of the development of definite traits calls to mind one that I would want to place high in the list, and that is Realism. We must assist and insist on the child facing his behavior realistically--with no alibies. To permit him to cover his bad habits or behavior with rationalization is to do him a great injustice. If he learns to put his finger on his own shortcomings which prevented his achieving a desired goal he will soon make correction of them. Realism is a great self-help.

Then the child should be realistic about the purpose of good behavior. We cannot allow children to continue to behave solely because they like us or wish to please us, or because it will bring them some individual advantage, but rather they must be aware that the purpose of right behavior is for the welfare of the group, and because it makes for successful group relationships.

I have added punctuality--although it is another instance of consistency--because it is so essential to smooth school operation, and again, enables the child to know what to expect.

Another technique which a good teacher employs besides the afore mentioned tolerance, courtesy, impartiality, objectivity, etc., is Praise-honest praise. There always is some reason for praise and it does wonders in unfolding personalities and other abilities. It gives the child the assurance of belonging, and a sense of security with the teacher.

In summary then we might say that social control is the positive approach to the training of children to live successfully in groups. It has its basis in an understanding of child nature, and the school's sense of responsibility in preparing him for living happily with others. There are certain techniques and devices which we use but they all have their roots in these understandings and purposes. It is one of the major responsibilities of a teacher, and some would rate it as the major responsibility. At any rate it merits thorough consideration and constant study.

To further one's understandings I would recommend reading on various aspects of control such as:

- anger
- fear
- sense of quiet
- rationalization
- objectivity
- emotionalism
- threatening
- reward, etc. or other phases

of behavior which determine personal reactions.