AMERICAN EDUCATION SERIES

GEORGE DRAYTON STRAYER, GENERAL EDITOR

CONSTRUCTIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

BY

WALTER ROBINSON SMITH, PH.D.

PROFESSOR OF EDUCATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE modern theory of education proposes that the school is a place where children are being educated by means of experiences in work and in play which are vital to them. In the intellectual field the solution of problems or the development of a project is considered of greater significance than the mere memorization of facts. In like manner, in the moral field emphasis is placed not on repression or punishment, but rather upon coöperative endeavor.

The discipline of children in school is made difficult by the fact that the group with which any one teacher works is made up of children with a great variety of intelligence and social background. Some of them because of superior intelligence will be quick to recognize the moral implication of their conduct. Others will have much greater difficulty in understanding their relationship to the group. Some of the children will come from homes where good temper, self-control, respect for truth, responsibility for group well-being have come to be accepted as standards of conduct. Other children will represent the extreme of individualism, and will present most difficult problems to the teacher who would help them to develop socially.

The author of this volume finds in this difficult and complex situation which confronts the teacher an opportunity for the teacher to contribute to the welfare, both of

the individual and of society. For him the disciplining of children is a constructive enterprise. He makes clear that the teacher's opportunity is found when the pupil who has violated accepted standards is helped to analyze the social situation and to modify his conduct in accord with principles which he himself can formulate. Teachers will find the book stimulating in its discussion of the social theory involved in discipline, and helpful in its practical suggestions.

GEORGE D. STRAYER

PREFACE

THERE are few thinking people who do not realize, with more or less misgiving, that discipline of the autocratic type has broken down. This is as true in the home, the church, and other social institutions as in the school. The sweep of democracy has been broad and clean, leaving no phase of life unaffected. It has permeated government and business, vocations and avocations, social classes and cultural ideals. Along with emancipating the serf, freeing the slave, elevating the status of workingmen, and broadening the outlook of women, it has ushered in a new age for children. In recent decades youth has acquired rights, privileges, responsibilities, and a self-respect that constitute a new heritage.

Quite naturally many good and wise men are disturbed lest the unwonted freedoms granted to American children and young people will lead to tragedy. If parental discipline, church discipline, and school discipline are relaxed, what will be the effect on character building? If the rod of correction is removed, how will the rising generation learn obedience, respect for law, and the reverence for age and race experience by which past generations have profited? Where will they gain that toughness of moral fiber which enabled our ancestors to endure "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" and remain steadfast under

trial? These and similar questions are too serious to be lightly cast aside.

To those who are facing the task of discipline from day to day, however, the problem is not so hopeless. Educators have seen such democratic movements as universal education, public control of schools, varied and enriched programs of study, and socialized methods of instruction filter into our schools without disrupting them. With regard to discipline they have found that, as dictatorial methods were abandoned, children became more responsive to leadership, more resourceful in self-direction, and not less self-sacrificing in emergencies. They are able to point to the recent World War as a conclusive demonstration that our young men have not lost the willingness to endure necessary hardships, nor the capacity to take discipline of an effective sort. Their conduct in the trenches would seem to indicate that somewhere, even though unconsciously, real discipline is being given and received. The source of authority and the methods of its administration may have been shifted from autocracy to democracy, but, as a matter of fact, it yet remains to be shown that the youth of to-day is less well controlled than were his ancestors.

It must be admitted, however, that the failure of the old disciplinary régime, not inaptly styled "beneficent tyranny," has left the situation somewhat chaotic. Many have discarded the authoritative type of control without developing any adequate system to take its place. In such cases there has been, without doubt, a distinct loss; but probably the actual cases are less numerous than tradition-bound observers have imagined. Just as thoughtful teachers have been reorganizing subject matter and methods

of teaching on the basis of scientific studies of youthful nature and social needs, so ingenious administrators have been devising ways and means of student control that will harmonize with social trends in other phases of life and provide a useful training for citizenship in a democratic society.

While this process of redirecting the aims and methods of discipline to meet changing social demands has been going forward, no one has heretofore tried to analyze and set forth in orderly fashion the full significance and requirements of a socialized disciplinary program. The need of such an analysis is evident and should provide any necessary justification of the author's attempt. School discipline ought to be directed toward definite ends. It should be educative in itself, not merely an adjunct of instruction. It must contribute its share toward preparing youth to compete and to coöperate, to live and to act in harmony with ethical standards, not only during school days but in after years. If the new heritage of freedom is not to be abused, and, more particularly, if it is to be employed as a training agency for social control and increased moral accountability, school authorities must invest ingenuity and patience, genuine thought and spiritual energy in an inspiring personal leadership and an intelligent supervision of school conduct. Discipline under the new régime cannot be made easier, but it may be made a more vital element in moral education than it ever could under any system of autocratic domination.

In the following pages the author has tried to set forth the ideals and principles and to suggest practical methods whereby discipline may be made a genuine educative force.

There is no assumption on his part of completeness or superior wisdom; but if this book can serve to bring the seriousness of the problem above the level of teacher-consciousness and point the way to the use of a constructive disciplinary program as the chief means of moral education available in the schools, the author will be content.

WALTER R. SMITH

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CONSTRUCTIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL CONTROL AS AN OBJECTIVE OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

A CONCOURSE of several hundred or even of several thousand people assemble for a community picnic. No one is in definite authority and little legal control is visible; yet people turn to the right in meeting each other, take turns in passing through narrow entrances or walks, indulge in various amusements, and eat their lunches undisturbed. Speakers of various opinions, parties, or organizations discuss issues without interruption or animosity. As the group assembles in reasonable order so it disperses, and if there is a congestion of traffic, or an accident, some one assumes leadership and others accept direction. This is such a common phenomenon that it fails to arouse comment or to become news. Control is evident but the processes lie hidden in the disciplinary backgrounds of community life.

A "wildcatting company" prospects for oil. It sinks a well and strikes a "gusher." Within a few days hundreds, or even thousands, of adventurers are camped in the vicinity. A city springs up so suddenly that legal authority

is inadequate and governmental forms have not had time to crystallize. Some confusion and certain injustices are inevitable; but somehow order gradually proceeds out of chaos and soon community relations are established. Previously acquired discipline asserts itself and traditional social controls become effective.

A new division of land in the West is opened for settlement. From various sections of the country prospective home owners assemble. By prearranged processes the land is parceled out and settlement takes place. Governmental authority is inconspicuous and community organization is absent; yet in a short time houses are built, neighborly relations are established, the division of labor and occupations takes place, schools are put in operation, religious services are regularly held, and all of the bases of a civilized society are laid. Again racial discipline asserts itself and a new state is in the making.

The social heritage of discipline. — The above illustrations, graded on the basis of increasing social stability, are selected from a wide variety which might be presented to show the constant workings of intangible social forces which make for the orderliness of human relationships. They represent familiar phases of contemporary civilized life but suggest the backward reaches of our social heritage. Man did not acquire such adaptability in a day; it is the product of countless generations of experiment and practice in using workable means of living together in groups. Social life is impossible without adequate means of mutual restraint, direction, and inspiration. It requires a willingness on the part of individuals to participate in the control of others and to accept necessary social checks imposed by

them. In other words, the process of social discipline is continuous and universal, manifesting itself wherever shared enterprises and associated life are attempted.

The development of this social discipline is cumulative from age to age and is to some extent a product of all institutions. It is a primary function of education (using the term in its broadest sense), and is a conspicuous element in home and school training. In those institutions the problem is universally recognized and continued efforts are made to instill in the young the ethical attitudes and habits necessary to social adaptation. While most disciplinary matters must be dealt with as individual or group cases, they generally arise in social situations, and effective treatment demands an understanding of the social purposes to be accomplished.

Weaknesses of traditional school discipline. — When we narrow our consideration to the function of the school in bringing about this social discipline, two weaknesses in its traditional administration are pronounced. The first of these was a lack of prevision. Teachers generally have waited for trouble to arise and then sought means for settling each case on its merits. Little constructive thought has been shown concerning the need of establishing broad disciplinary programs for the prevention of irregularities and the use of school discipline as a fundamental feature of character education.

The other outstanding weakness of traditional school discipline was its individualistic nature. This was the outgrowth not merely of an era in which individualistic enterprises were idealized but of the fact that whatever scientific study has been given the subject has been psycho-

logical. Conduct has been analyzed with reference to the nature of the individual child and his responsibility rather than from any possible group causes or social results. Hence individual treatment has been emphasized, and wherever educative aims have been sought they have been directed toward the development of self-control. But more careful thought has shown that the springs of conduct and its direction are as much social as individual matters; therefore a study of group relationships, or the sociological treatment of disciplinary problems, is as necessary as psychological treatment. Social control must be as definite an objective of education as self-control. They are mutually reënforcing elements in the production of individual character and the promotion of social well-being. Since practically all teachers have some knowledge of psychology, the present need, in approaching a study of the aims, methods, and problems of discipline, is the clarification of their social aspects. For this purpose a simple analysis of the general processes and problems of social control as they are related to school control and as they provide an objective for disciplinary programs should form the soundest basis.

Nature of social control. — The assembling of any small group of people lays the foundations of a society. These people may be like-minded or antagonistic, friendly or hostile, confiding or suspicious. They may be of similar maturity, intelligence, and experience or of variously assorted ages, abilities, and histories. Yet whatever the nature and training of each may be, their contact is certain to set in operation a series of emotions, attitudes, and acts by which they will influence each other. Competition