

# CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

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## PREFACE

It is hoped that the material presented in this book will be helpful to teachers, supervisors, principals, and others who are interested in securing perspective with reference to the discipline or control of pupils in elementary schools. The problem of pupil control is in a state of theoretical and practical confusion, not exceeded perhaps by that of any other phase of current educational effort. There are those who commit themselves unreservedly for "order" through a rather rigid type of external direction. There are others who, with a certain apologetic hesitation, but not without some conviction, declare themselves for freedom and control through the children's own group enterprises. Paradoxical as it may seem, the whole question of control has attained a certain relative insignificance, both in theoretical and in practical discussion. Matters of method and curriculum organization engross the teacher, whose latent sensitivity to questions of discipline is aroused to proportions of resentment by the alleged neglect of this phase of the child's school life.

A real danger lurks in this situation. Whereas the diversity and apparent incompatibility of existing

attitudes makes proper orientation highly important, the submerged position of the whole subject in educational discussion invites hasty generalization and shortsighted interpretation. Any method of orientation which omits a consideration of the historical antecedents and theoretical connections of current attitudes is likely to result in an inadequate sense of values. To try to establish criteria of worth by a direct interpretation of the present situation is like trying to make a visual analysis of the structure or design of a tapestry while holding it too near the eye. Present conceptions and practices need to be viewed as the expressions of historical trends or movements if perspective and a genuine sense of values are to be attained.

The sequence of topics and the method of organization followed in this book adhere, therefore, to the order of events in pupil control since the rise of the present system of public elementary education in the United States. An attempt is made to state the dominant attitudes toward control held in connection with each of the outstanding educational movements and theories. Part Two is a statement of the situation during the establishment of the present system of schools and before religious authority as the basic assumption in control was extensively questioned. It deals also with efforts following the mid-century to find practical means of mitigating the severity of prevalent methods of control and to shift the basis of

morality from religion to a vague social authoritarianism. Part Three shows the bearings of the kindergarten movement, Herbartianism, and the moral-education movement upon control. Following the discussion of these newer movements is a statement of the changed status of authority in control. Part Four deals with the more recent scientific movement in education in relation to control. Following a statement of the reported bearings of recent child-study methods, an effort is made to interpret such critical attitudes as were an outgrowth of the spirit of inquiry, biological evolution, and social change. Part Five is an interpretation of the current social movement in education in relation to control. Two phases are treated. First, there is an effort to state the attitudes toward control that have been found in the more political conceptions of democracy. Second, there is an attempt to state the organic conception of control that has grown out of efforts to formulate the educational bearings of biological evolution and social change.

The book as a whole does not represent an attempt to set forth a program or consistent policy of control, though it is believed by the writer that most of the considerations treated are requisite to any adequate view. The book is intended rather to serve as a basis of orientation and should be especially helpful to students who wish to clarify the relation of the control and instructional functions. If the treatment of the more recent developments seems to reflect unduly a

particular point of view, it is not because the author has been unmindful of his obligation to consider all pertinent data. An earnest attempt has been made to present the more fundamental considerations that have been recognized as relevant to the larger problem, quite irrespective of their source. If the material seems weighted in favor of a particular theory or writer, it should be observed that the data examined seem to indicate that few really new considerations relative to control have been offered by most of the writers in this field. Much of that which is now urged in the name of sound theory is in reality a repetition of proposals made decades or even generations ago. These have been treated in the sequence of topics in approximately their proper chronological settings. If such views still persist, their presence may be accounted for at least in part on the basis of the force of customary belief and attitude.

The use of reasonable space prohibits separate acknowledgment of the numerous obligations incurred in connection with the study. For any insight revealed, I am indebted to Teachers College and especially to those with whom I have had the privilege, as Graduate Scholar and Research Fellow, to study in elementary education, philosophy, and psychology. In particular I wish to mention Professors Frederick G. Bonser and William H. Kilpatrick, who, from the date of my entrance in the institution, manifested a very personal interest in my advancement. I wish to thank those

leaders at Teachers College and elsewhere whose divergence of conception and whose obvious sincerity and devotion to educational progress have helped sharpen the issues and define the problem involved in the study. I am peculiarly indebted to Professors Milo B. Hillegas, Edward H. Reisner, and Lois C. Mossman, whose critical guidance and constant sympathy have been genuinely helpful. I wish also to acknowledge deep gratitude to my wife, Olive Oliphint Harris, whose unceasing encouragement and very substantial help have made possible the completion of the work.

I wish, finally, to express my indebtedness to the various periodicals and publishers for permission to use previously published material. Quotations from Dewey's *Experience and Nature* and Riley's *American Thought* are used by permission of and special arrangement with the respective publishers, The Open Court Publishing Company and Henry Holt and Company.

P. E. H.

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

IN so far as American education is concerned, there can be no doubt that the attitude of both the theorist and the practitioner toward the problem of school discipline has been almost revolutionized within the past generation. Thirty years ago the first law of the school was order, the first task of the teacher was to compel order, and the first duty of the pupil was to obey and "behave."

It is not too much to say that contemporary educational theory almost completely reverses these standards. In the older sense of silence and rigidity, "order" as an objective of school government has been thoroughly discredited. To compel anyone to do anything is about as far from the present-day ideals of good teaching as anything could well be. And obedience, once regarded as a virtue of the first order, is now looked upon in some quarters as far more nearly akin to a vice.

Throughout this period of change, practice has followed theory fairly faithfully. There are many schools, even in America, where authority still rules with an iron hand; but such schools constitute a much

smaller proportion of the total number than they did a decade or two decades ago. They are far less numerous in our country than elsewhere. Indeed, if we except Russia and the so-called "free" schools now found occasionally in Austria, Germany, and other countries of Europe, the overthrow of the authoritarian conception of school government is essentially an American achievement.

In the present volume, Dr. Harris sets forth the shifts and changes in educational theory that have brought about this transformation, together with an illuminating interpretation of what these changes mean in the light of present-day tendencies in the social and the psychological sciences. Of especial importance are the conclusions that he reaches with reference to the integration of the control and instructional functions. It cannot be denied that the regimen of school life is itself an educative force of far-reaching significance. The possibilities of directing this powerful agency with intelligent foresight are well worth the most thoroughgoing investigation. To harmonize the processes and outcomes of control with the broader aims of education is not an easy problem to solve, but our author has rendered an invaluable service in defining it clearly and in pointing out possible steps toward its solution.

That Dr. Harris's point of view differs in some respects from that of the editor is in no sense out of harmony with the traditions of the Modern Teachers' Series. The editor is very proud to present to the



educational public this first book of a vigorous young writer. It is a book distinguished by a scholarship that is meticulous but far from pedantic. Its treatment of moot questions is both exceptionally well informed and eminently fair. Every page and every line reveal the author as a sincere and earnest seeker after truth.

WILLIAM C. BAGLEY

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PART ONE  
INTRODUCTION

# CHANGING FROM PUPILS TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

PRESENTED BY THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The members of the Board of Education are proud to present this report on the progress of the school system in the past year. The report is a reflection of the hard work and dedication of the teachers, students, and staff. It shows the many achievements and the challenges that have been overcome. The Board is committed to providing a high quality education for all students and to ensuring that the school system is a safe and supportive environment for learning. This report is a testament to the success of the school system and the commitment of the Board to the future of the district.

The Board of Education is pleased to announce that the school system has achieved a number of significant milestones in the past year. These include the implementation of new curriculum standards, the completion of a major facility renovation project, and the successful launch of a new community outreach program. The Board is proud of the progress that has been made and is committed to continuing to work towards a bright future for the school system.

# CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

## CHAPTER I

### DIFFICULTIES OF THE PRESENT SITUATION IN CONTROL

THE material here offered is the result of an effort to determine the present dominant theoretical and practical attitudes regarding the discipline or moral control of pupils in elementary schools. This has been accomplished by showing historically the sequence and evolution of working conceptions together with some of the correlative social, religious, and educational factors which have in greater or less degree conditioned them since the rise of public elementary education in the United States. The problem which furnished the basis of the study was suggested by an existing practical situation which involves much diversity of conception. In the particular field of control or school discipline the striking contrasts of attitude are illustrated in the following quotations:

"You need discipline in the teaching of children just as much as you do in an army. They must be orderly and quiet before they can be taught."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> O'Shea, William J., *The World*, New York, March 28, 1926.



"It seems to me that there are at least two contrasted positions: first, that of those who would stop the noise and are indifferent to the character effects of how they do it; and, second, that of those who seek primarily the character effect and are relatively indifferent as to whether noise continues or is stopped. Between these two are many intermediate positions."<sup>1</sup>

The existence of these attitudes in comparison and in contrast with certain historical conceptions only increases the apparent difficulty of progress in the present situation. If net progress relative to control is a fact, it is in part obscured in the confusion caused by such apparently disparate views. The close similarity of the following views, separated by nearly a century but still present in much of educational thought and practice, reveals the aggravated nature of the problem:

"It is not a question of influencing the thinking of the pupil, nor the emotional reactions of the pupil, but solely of securing the desired behavior. . . . It is a necessary part of the business of education for the teacher and principal to insist upon and enforce obedience from the child — providing the child does not give it without forcing."<sup>2</sup>

"There must be authority. The pupils may not often feel it. But they must know it is always at hand, and the pupils must be taught to submit to it as to simple authority. The subjection of the governed to the will of one man [teaching was done quite altogether by men at that time] in such a way that the expression of his will must be the final decision of every question is the only form of government that will answer in home or in school."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kilpatrick, William H., *Foundations of Method: Informal Talks on Teaching*, New York, 1925, p. 317.

<sup>2</sup> Rich, S. G., *Journal of Educational Method*, Vol. 4, 1924-1925, p. 296 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Abbott, Jacob, address before American Institute of Instruction, 1831; see *First Annual Report*.