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GROWTH FOR CITIZENSHIP

Winifred Winn

Education today must be concerned with the values in citizenship that should be developed early in the child's life. Value, being defined as something we prize or cherish, involves deliberation and choice. In many communities children are being over-protected or under-supervised, thus leaving to the schools the training of their children in the way they should go. Therefore in the best interest of schools and society, citizenship values must be incorporated into the school program.

If the schools are to take on some of the responsibility, how is it to be done? Let us consider some of the concepts that would promote better citizenship for the individual and society such as: (1) be yourself, (2) be aware, (3) be respectful, (4) be responsible, (5) be healthy, (6) be alive and thinking, (7) be loving, (8) be creative. A teacher of the primary grades must begin by relating any learning to the child's world and his experiences in it. She must always be alert to implement these suggestions whenever and wherever possible for reinforcement is necessary for retention by the young child.

Be Yourself

Basic to all values is the value of knowing one's self, his perceptions, his aspirations and his direction. Since all behavior is purposive, a child must understand why he behaves as he does and to what end activity is directed. A teacher's duty from the day the child enters school is to help the child understand himself and to develop realistic goals in the light of his ability. Thus the teacher must accept the child as he is, help him to have faith in himself as a human being and to develop and grow in a way that is consistent with truth and honor. This perception of one's self encompasses the family constellation in all its ramifications. The interactions within the family have a direct effect on a child's behavior and his perception of himself. The child's concept of himself in relation to his family or his favorite activities or desires may be made manifest in his early drawings, particularly if asked to make a book of pictures of himself, his family, where he sleeps, what he eats for breakfast, what he wants for his birthday, how he goes places, his best friend and his favorite activity.

The school tends to reinforce the idea that certain traits of behavior are acceptable and others are undesirable. The desirable traits may change as the child matures. However, research has shown that

the most outstanding characteristics in children in early school life continue to be outstanding at the college level. It is, therefore, important that we build upon children's interests and project forward in a developmental way. Each child is unique and the factors that affect his thinking are dependent upon sensory imagery developed during his pre-school years. To the over-protected or culturally deprived child the school will need to provide those experiences that give him percepts and a basis for imagery so that he may form concepts upon which to grow and develop.

Be Aware

After the first few years of a child's life his awareness of the surroundings is often lost sight of in the maze of family activities. It is the child's awareness to sight and sound that a good parent and teacher look for in determining his capabilities. From the day a child enters school, teachers spend many hours and use many devices to sharpen a child's concept of likenesses and differences. A child's use of puzzles, shapes and sizes, colors light and dark, sounds loud and soft, objects big and little, movement fast and slow, city and farm life, feelings of happiness and sadness, senses of taste and smell, all start the child on the path of creative thinking. Thinking prepares one for the act of doing something, to produce new meanings and to build concepts that reinforce rational belief. Concepts emerge out of perceptual experiences, memories, images and are the product of imaginative thinking. Thinking is a requisite for adjustment in our changing world. For the elementary school child thinking is an act of using words, sounds, pictures, numbers, symbols and signs to secure new meanings and achieve new purposes. It is the act of manipulating symbols representing concepts and objects which are not present to the senses.

Be Respectful

One assumes there has been respect for someone or somebody in the home, but all too often there seems to be no carry-over to the school situation and public places. The respect for parents, teachers, schools, law officers and public officials is a basic value of citizenship. It involves some critical thinking and an awareness of a purposeful individual. As the child enters school certain behavior patterns are set in motion to develop respect for himself, for his school, for his teacher and his own behavior in relation to others. Even the smallest child can be made to understand that certain things belong to others and that he doesn't touch them without permission, while some things

he is allowed to use at his convenience. A child can be taught to respect someone else's ability to do something without impugning his own abilities. The freedom to develop his abilities to the optimum of his capacities is the basic right of our Constitution. Early in education a child should learn a respect for the flag and the country for which it stands. He should be assisted in an understanding of the lives of our great leaders and their struggle to conceive this democratic way of life and thus build a sense of national pride to protect it.

In the child's eagerness and excitement of early school experiences a teacher can develop a respect for knowledge and a purpose for inquiry, discovery, and solution. While it is clear in the developmental process that purposes change, children need to have some self-direction to their activities if they are to gain meaningful mental content. When a child understands what he perceives in various situations, he develops certain concepts which may be interlocking and interacting with other concepts. Thus the values of citizenship are interactive and interlocking one with another. In a changing society of many cultures being meshed together, the teacher has a big responsibility to help children understand the plus values of another race or religion. The teacher can enrich children's lives greatly by an appreciation of different cultures in their respective communities and ways of working together and enjoying each other.

Be Responsible

As a result of over-protection or neglect many children develop the projective behavior technique early in life which misguides them all through life. First of all, a child must be responsible for himself and his actions. He must develop responsibility in respect to the things that belong to him and their care, as well as those that belong to others. Being responsible would encompass understanding and thoughtfulness toward others. Courtesy and consideration in the classroom, through self-control during activities in which he is not taking part, develop responsibility. If a child has respect for his home, his parents, he will be loyal to those people. This, then, enhances his self-respect and his self-concept.

Be Healthy

It is evident that health is a basic value and interlocks with all the other suggestions. For if a child has some impairment, be it physical, emotional, or psychological, he can not develop to his optimum. Since physical examinations for all youngsters are a prerequisite in most school systems, it is, perhaps, the teacher's responsi-

bility to discover the emotional and psychological aspects of a child's behavior. Observation of children, as they come to school, how they play in the school and on the playground, will reveal many clues to a child's conduct. Many fears and misconceptions can be alleviated by helping children interpret their home relationships and to discuss likes and differences and the reasons these likes and differences exist in their family situation. Often parents are so busy they do not see the child's view and his frustration resulting from interaction in the family. Harboring such frustrations may lead to an emotionally disturbed child. There are many health and social study books that can help the child interpret home and family living. Children should be helped to understand that it is healthy to disagree some of the time, that each individual has a right to his opinion so long as it does not interfere with the rights of others. Gradually as they grow and develop, their opinions may change. Teachers have too long left this aspect of mental health to chance. A young child has limited scope of activity and cannot be expected to know that his family situation may be very different from others. This kind of comparative study is well within the grasp of the first grader. This critical thinking can be applied to safety factors of the child's life and give meaning and purpose to the safety rules.

The reasons for enough sleep, play and proper food become the focus of a child's responsibility and help him to live within certain limits at home. The child should be given some definite responsibilities.

Too many children are lacking in emotional maturity. Parents must assist the school in developing attitudes for work and play. It seems that many parents have slipped into a lethargic attitude in regards to attitudes of children as they begin school. It is possible that parents need some help in appreciating their place in respect to understanding growth patterns and the disciplines involved.

Be Alive and Thinking

Reading specialists agree that the extent to which a child brings mental content to his school subjects is most important. How does a child perceive his surroundings in the community? No doubt he needs some help in interpreting and evaluating what he sees. In this way he can form concepts about his community and these concepts will determine his behavior and attitudes in the home, on the playground and in the classroom. If a home has books and magazines that are used and treasured, he will likely feel that same way toward his books. If there is discussion of ideas and events, he, too, is likely to form some

concepts from his reading. If there is free interaction in this discussion, he will be able to find release from doubts and fears and be eager to inquire and discover without fear of reprisal.

From the first day in school teachers must be very careful not to destroy this inquiring spirit while still keeping it within the constructs of school society. With children of many cultural backgrounds the climate of a classroom must be skillfully handled. Here again, there should be allowance for interaction of ideas and an understanding of why each person feels as he does. The teacher must be aware of the verbal fluency and sophistication of knowledge which many children develop today as a result of television. Children need to be encouraged to investigate why certain conditions or facts exist and whether they are valid truths in today's world. The value of the experiences a child has is dynamically related to his human aspirations by which he extends himself toward further fulfillment. As his values become internalized, his interests and concerns shape his personality. Goal striving is the essence of personality. There is growing evidence to substantiate the belief that mental growth does not always proceed at a fixed rate but spurts and stalls as part of the unfolding growth patterns. Intelligence is a result of interaction between the child's heredity and his environment and must be fed and nurtured to develop to its fullest capacity. The critical reader must be able to visualize content and relate it to his own experiences, to draw inferences and predict outcomes. For the primary child this could mean the interpretation of a picture, what preceded it and what could happen next.

Be Loving

The feeling of pride and respect represents love in a family situation. That love must contain disciplines for the good of the recipient. The love for a pet does not mean that he is given all the food he wants. When mother says no, she is probably showing her love for a child in a protective sense. Parental love must allow the individual to develop his own abilities through purposeful experiences suitable to his level of attainment. Parents should expect children to take certain definite responsibilities within the home setting to build a cohesive and secure relationship. It is through this love that children should learn appreciation for their family, for their schools, for their churches and for the freedom to enjoy these aspects of our society. So often in the hustle and bustle of everyday experiences people forget to enjoy the wonders of nature and the opportunities about them.

Be Creative

Democracy matures and flourishes on the creative efforts of its people. The task of the school is to provide a climate where creativity will evolve from a need to experiment. Creativity will enhance the child's self-concept and might possibly lead to the discovery of a new concept for the child or classroom. It involves exploring, responding, perceiving relationships, making choices, taking risks and giving expression to developing ideas. Many a child has found the purpose for reading and thinking deeply from the need to create. A child, however, does not have to produce something to enjoy creativity. From little seeds big acorns grow.

A perceptive teacher will be sensitive to the creative needs of children. It may well be the necessary release of tensions for many children, but it cannot take place in a tightly structured classroom. A child will not attempt to be creative if he is doomed to failure before he starts.

Since aesthetic experience begins with and depends on the sensory perception, the alert teacher will encourage the children to develop a sensitivity for their surroundings, to enjoy something for the sheer joy of the experience.

It is quite evident that all people are going to have more leisure time. How are we helping children to use this leisure? Leisure is defined as something one does for the joy of doing it. To enjoy many leisure-time activities, one must read, evaluate and make choices. People enjoy doing something in which there is an accomplished skill or ability. The individual who is well stocked with ideas is not apt to be bored. The manipulation of ideas resulting from purposeful living and from extensive reading can provide pleasure and real enjoyment.

The writer has attempted to describe some of the basic values of citizenship and what place it must have in our schools. Certainly parents have a basic responsibility to participate actively in these values and to show an appreciation for implementing them in society. The public too has a responsibility to support education in protecting our freedoms, "for freedom is something to be won, achieved, lived through and always about to be born," states Ribicoff.

Thinking is a requisite for adjustment in our changing world. Each individual must find satisfactory answers to his problems of time, ability, money and health through reading, learning experiences and the thinking processes.

These values, self-concept, awareness, respect, responsibility, health,

active thought, love, and creativity must be taught through experiences as well as verbal lessons, through active participation as well as study.

There are signs of dynamic concern for growth on the part of teachers in schools. "Those who are professionally concerned about teaching and learning, go on learning, using their reading, their contacts, their problems and their experiences as a challenge and resource for further development," says Zirbes.

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