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Poston Schools

To: All Members of Staff:

DEMOCRACY AND PROBLEMS OF DISCIPLINE

Below is reproduced for your information a paper by Dr. Laura Thompson author-ologist now in the Indian Service, in which the author has made some interesting suggestions regarding the problem of discipline in a democratic society. The concept directive discipline appears to be especially helpful. Your comments are solicited.

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TRADITIONAL PATTERNS OF DISCIPLINE
AND THE PROBLEM OF EDUCATION IN HAWAII

By Laura Thompson

"The types of discipline characteristic of the various cultural groups in Hawaii and the age at which they are used are extremely important in relation to the problem of personality development and adjustment of life....."

One of the most important factors in the development of personality is the pattern of discipline which society imposes upon the individual. To explain this concept we shall discuss briefly modes of discipline in infancy.

According to psychoanalytic hypothesis, infants do not perceive their helplessness but feel as though they control the world by a sort of magic omnipotence. Abram Kardiner states, "...the control over the environment exerted by the infant through the mother's agency is very much like the one we subsequently observe in magic practices. Many fairy tales exploit this form of control. The simplest is illustrated by the story of Aladdin's lamp where the genie obeys Aladdin every time he rubs the lamp, and the boy is, moreover, obligated to the genie in no way whatsoever. A few vocalizations of the child set in motion a series of complicated changes in the outer world which the child does not understand, but which terminate in easing his tension."

The relationship of infant to mother on the basis of magic control is perpetuated in paranoid individuals. On the cultural level it appears in forms of primitive religion in which an attempt is made to control supernatural forces by means of magic.

Normally the period of magic omnipotence in the infant soon comes to an end for as the child's needs and resources develop the technic of magic control begins to fail. New types of adaptation, stimulated by the environment and the growth process are attempted and those which prove successful, that is, gratifying to needs, are accepted. Whenever, however, the child finds himself confronted with a situation which he cannot meet because of real or imagined failure of resources he falls into an attitude of dependency. That is, he expects the parent or guardian to exercise on his behalf the same magic attributes which he formerly believed he himself possessed. He soon learns, however, that

if he wishes to enlist this magical aid on his own behalf he must make himself loved by the parent by means of acquiescence or obedience to disciplines.

The early basic disciplines, such as anal control and weaning, are cultural demands imposed upon the child before he is able to appreciate their significance. However they are backed by explicit and implicit rewards or punishment. To acquiesce or to obey is to bring about conditions for being loved and protected. To disobey is to incur disapprobation and a withdrawal of love. This type of discipline is restrictive and develops an ingratiating acquiescence to authority and repressed aggression. Such experiences on the pleasure pain level are the child's first contact with social pressure. As the child grows older and begins to be able to understand the meaning of the disciplines which society imposes upon him, however, his training may proceed by means of the directional rather than the restrictive type of discipline. Directional discipline differs from restrictive in that it is on the rational rather than the pleasure pain level. It proceeds on the principle that the child, by understanding the end-in-view and the means by which it may be attained, behavior intelligently and to adjust himself creatively to the group. Such a rational type of social discipline develops personal responsibility for the consequences of one's activities, initiative, adaptability and independence of thought.

Discipline and Personality Development

The types of discipline imposed on a child and the age at which they are introduced are of profound significance in regard to his personality development and the type of socialization he eventually attains as an adult. In fact they form the basis of his attitude toward authority in later life and are also reflected in his outlook on life as expressed in religion, philosophy or magic. For instance, the attitude of dependency on the parent may be transferred as the child grows older to other types of authority such as the dictator, the king, the law or public opinion. Also it may be internalized in the form of individual conscience. The directional type of discipline, on the other hand, tends to develop a rational and evaluating attitude toward authority and the methods by which it is imposed.

Recent research has revealed that methods of discipline differ considerably among cultural groups and that each group has a particular basic pattern of discipline. Of course individual variation occurs but this is usually within the basic pattern. These traits of child training are part of the traditional cultural heritage passed from generation to generation in the group and form one of the most important personality determinants in the culture.

In some societies, particularly the despotic or totalitarian type characterized by the attempt of one group to impose its will upon another, the predominant type of discipline is restrictive. Order is achieved by means of punishment and frustration. Under this system the resulting repressed aggression is likely to be expressed in ingratiation. Under pressure it breaks out into revolt. On the other hand for the successful functioning of a democracy, characterized by the participation of all its members in social control and social change, the directional type of discipline is the ideal.

Significance of Problem.....

What significance does this problem have for education in Hawaii? The accepted concept of education in a rapidly changing modern culture includes

not only the transmission of the traditional heritage but also the preparation of the child to take part in future change. We have seen that the directional type of discipline is the ideal type of participation in social control and social change. Moreover, mental hygiene teaches us that, since basic attitudes of adaptation are formed in the earlier years, the individual adjusts himself to the group with least stress if his activities are restricted from infancy to conform to socially accepted adult patterns of behavior. We may conclude, therefore, that the types of discipline characteristic of the various cultural groups in Hawaii and the age at which they are used are extremely important in relation to the problem of personality development and adjustments to life, hence to the problem of education in the local setting. Not until they have been described and understood can the full significance of the discipline problem in the schools be understood and an intelligent plan of discipline be formulated to develop intelligent law-abiding citizens adjusting with as little friction as possible to life in the Territory.