

adult social life."¹ Like all societies, even on the miniature level, the school preserves certain ideals of behavior and achievement. It has its own systems of reward and punishment, opportunity and *verbot*, success and failure—all of which are communicated to the pupil population by its officers of instruction. Educators justify the school's social teachings as emerging from the challenge of life in the American community. They believe this scientifically ordered environment not only reflects the societal pressures upon the child but also helps him come to terms with these realities. In essence then, the social function of the school is to educate the child so that he may better internalize those responses to cultural stimuli that are sanctioned and rewarded by our society.

The question of cultural orientation in elementary education

Whether this purpose is served equally for children from all socio-economic groups has been open to serious doubt. As some critics argue, the school's personnel and curricula are generally geared to teach middle-class values, and can thus fit our youth for successful living only on that level of our social hierarchy. Lower-class children find such values out of tune with their adjustment needs. To them the school experiences can be profitable only if they have the will and strength to break with their cultural traditions and climb the social ladder. Needless to say, few try it and fewer still are successful. The majority—who incidentally constitute as much as two-thirds of our total elementary school population—are neither culturally motivated to succeed at school nor do they receive as much guidance through education as do middle-class children in meeting the status demands of their respective environments. As a result, we find the highest incidence of school failure among lower-class students who feel they have least at stake in their achievement efforts.

Perhaps the nub of the matter lies in the agreement, or lack of it, between the youngster's social learnings at home and at school. There can be no doubt that the middle-class child is better oriented by his parents to meet the demands of school life than his lower-class fellow student. At home he is encouraged to work hard for good grades, and to respect the teacher as his companion and critic whose authority must never be questioned. He is taught also to obey such treasured little maxims as "Health is Wealth," "Cleanliness is Next to Godliness," "Silence is Golden," and the "Golden Rule"—ideas around which the school builds its behavior standards. For a report card that measures up to expectations he is rewarded not only with parental affection but often with material gifts as well, while failures are considered shameful, to say the very least.

Teachers and middle-class parents generally work in concert at endowing their children with the same pattern of social attitudes, manners, morals, and ambitions. The school, like the home, instructs children to curb their aggressive habits and the use of bad language, to respect their own and other people's property, to show great effort in school work, and to take on the countless little social graces that are considered "marks of good breeding." Both look upon educational achievement as a means of gaining social status, and this desire to "get ahead" is a prime ambition in the middle-class.

By way of contrast, lower-class permissiveness usually militates against the school's teachings. As the Kluckhohns point out: "The parents take no daily interest in the education of children. If the child 'skips' school, he frequently is not punished by the parents. Little attention is paid to the child's homework, and there is little supervision of home-study. There is little realistic planning for long-term education or efforts to relate education to practical goals."² In addition to this, the home places children under comparatively few behavior controls. Instead, they are granted autonomy at an early age and allowed more freedom in sexual exploration and open aggression than is approved by the school. Respect for authority is not stressed as much as the fear of it and the avoidance of getting caught once the child has transgressed. Small wonder then, that lower-class children find the school's regimen painfully oppressive. To them, conformity to the rules and routines of the classroom is a sign of weakness, and anyone who earns the approbation of his teacher is looked down upon as a dupe.

¹ Robert J. Havighurst, W. Lloyd Warner, and Martin Loeb, *Who Shall Be Educated*, Harper and Brothers, New York and London, 1944, p. 55.

² See Clyde Kluckhohn and Florence R. Kluckhohn, "American Culture: Generalized Orientations and Class Patterns," *Conflicts of Power in Modern Culture* (edited by Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, and R. M. MacIver), Harper and Brothers, New York, 1947, pp. 123-127.