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MODERNIZATION AND THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN POOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Discussion Paper

on

Dr. Beatrice Avalos's

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Dr. Beatrice Avalos's paper is strictly speaking the author's reflections on some of the results she and her collaborators obtained from an ethnographic study carried out in a number of primary schools in four Latin American countries and not "in Poor Developing Societies" as claimed in its title. Although Bolivia, Columbia, Chile and Venezuela, the specific countries in which the original study the results of which were reflected upon in the paper are poor developing countries, they are in no way representative of similar poor countries most of which are to be found on the Asian and African continents. With respect to the subjects covered in the original study, the young children studied were not representative of their age cohorts in their respective countries. The young children were offsprings of poor, low socio-economic status parents.

Congrary to what its title would lead the reader to expect, Dr. Avalos's paper is not a study of the impact or influence of modernisation on the education of young children in poor developing countries "its purpose was to examine, through means of the teaching process in the first four years, the events and practices that might shed light on the high rates of early school failure experienced by low socio-economic groups in Latin America." However, some of the results she discussed in her paper shows that non-modern, authoritarian

mode of teacher - pupil interaction has a high probability of producing children that might be high on a properly constructed authoritarian personality scale - which would be antithetical to the development of modernisation in its positive sense.

Many students of the process of modernisation and especially of the types of psychic qualities and value attitudes prerequisite to it will find it difficult to take Dr. ~~A~~valo's side in her quarrel with the teachers who placed great value on cleanliness and order and who gave the impression "through the teaching that "out there" lay a different world to which children could gain access through their education." If one accepts that one of the features of modernisation is the ability to bring about innovation that would lead to increased productivity in many aspects of life, and if one calls to mind the role of frustration and dissatisfaction with existing scheme of things in the discharge of innovative activities, the teachers by stressing the values of neatness, and "undervaluing of the childrens own environment" might be creating an inferiority complex in the pupils which some of them might in later life relieve by a burst of creativity and innovativeness.

In one of his very last papers on the growth of higher education and research in the United States, Talcott Parsons (1978) pointed out ^{that} the willingness with which some of the big "tycoons" of the new industrial development - the Rockefellers, Carnegies, and Mellons financially supported higher education and other non-profit causes "was related their parven^ue status." He goes on to add: "American standards of academic excellence have largely been modelled on the best of Europe, ..." It is important, however, to underscore the fact that has been made well-known by the sociologist Robert K. Merton (1957) that innovation is not the only possible response to frustration or dissatisfaction with the existing scheme of things. Other possible responses are conformity, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion.

One final point that I would like to make and underline for our discussion of Dr. Avalos's paper has to do with her research design which she did not disclose in her reflections. In order to convince the reader that the casual relationship that she claimed to find between the hidden curriculum ^{of} ~~and~~ the primary school system she studied and the value-attitudes of the pupils ~~are~~ indeed valid and reliable she would need to produce the following types of evidence:- (i) that the relationship between the variables of interest was not due to the effect of other variables; (ii) that the variables co-occur and co-vary; and (iii) that the independent variables precede the dependent ones in order of occurrence. The fact that Dr. Avalos's study is an ethnographic one might make it difficult for her to produce these types of evidence but it does not make it impossible to produce approximate ones.

In conclusion, I would like to commend Dr. Avalos for the interesting way in which she summarises some of the theories of moral development formulated by leading authorities such as Piaget and Kohlberg and also for the distinction she makes between the positive and negative concepts of modernisation.

References

- Merton, R. K., Social Theory and Social Structure
The Free Press, 1957.
- Parsons, T. Action Theory and the Human Condition,
The Free Press, 1978.