MODERNIZATION AND THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN
IN POOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

by

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I wish to focus this article on a reflection about young children who live in the poorest contexts of low-income countries in the Third World and especially on those whom I have met in the shanty town areas of some of the Latin American cities.

I will begin by arguing against the universalisation of concepts such as "modern" and "education for modernity"; but I will defend the notion of values which have universal character and which are based on a common conception of the dignity of human beings and the right of all people to be considered and respected as such. This involves the right to live and to develop as human beings, to work, to be imaginative and creative with regard to the problems faced, to share affection and concern for others, but also to be critical and harsh where injustice or destruction prevails. All this seems a well-repeated declaration of principles, but in the concrete circumstances of today's world these words, to a large extent, have only a rhetorical meaning. They need to be refreshed when dealing with concrete issues and circumstances.

I will examine then some educational experiences that in the early life of a child who is poor affect his or her view of the world and of people, and will illustrate this with examples of research carried out with Latin American primary school children. Finally I will look at what we or others could do towards understanding how far education of the young child can serve as a stepping-stone to the development of responsible social actors, and to see what responsibility in this respect is left to other social and political institutions.

The Concept of Modernisation

To an important extent the concept of modernisation has been closely linked to the desirability that poor countries progress toward styles of living and modes of production and organisation of economic activities which are characteristic of the industrialised world. This understanding, however, is of a text-book kind in that its practical expression depends on who or which group or even which country is interpreting its meaning. "Progress toward" may mean that very different limits are suggested as ends-in-view depending on whether it is or not convenient for groups or individuals to reach levels belonging to those that shape the economy and social life of a country. Thus education, seen as a condition for modernisation, may mean four, eight or twelve years as a minimum length for schooling; or its quality may be understood as a function of development of basic skills, vocational training or high-level cognitive behaviour — all within very different parameters according to who and how many will be allowed to achieve control positions in social and political life. The "back to basics" and the "direct instruction" positions would hardly be advocated for groups of whom high intellectual output is expected either as scientists or as efficient administrators of a social system. But the "back to basics" would be considered a desirable end for those people whose literacy and numeracy background is limited and who are not expected to move much beyond the mastery of these skills.

Poor countries are poor in different ways. They may lack natural resources to keep a population well fed and to provide

enough means of livelihood (the situation experienced today in some African regions). They may have resources but with these unevenly distributed so that extreme poverty in one region contrasts with wealth in another as in the case of the northeastern and the southern regions of Brazil.

The concept of "modernisation" receives different meanings according to context. But the understanding here is that it applies to people,[1] people who may be seen as "traditional", "non-modern" but who in reality may be simply described as poor. From this perspective, it is possible to speak of negative and positive meanings of modernity.

Seen in its negative connotations modernity and modernisation are processes by which people who see themselves as deprived of material products that seemingly make life easier to live and to enjoy, strive to overcome this distance between the lack and the having of objects presented as desirable. A symbolic expression of modernity of this sort is what one might call "the purchasing power". So understood, modernisation becomes the process whereby increase in purchasing power is made possible. The complexity of the systems which underpin world-wide and national economies is such that the ordinary citizen often does not see by what means his or her purchasing power is increased. Within the framework of a military dictatorship and a Friedmanite type of economy as was practised, for example, in Chile people learned that purchasing power could easily be increased through borrowing. During the period between 1977 and 1981 credit cards appeared in that country, banks were generous

in their lending offers and the low rate of exchange for US currency allowed cheap imports to flood the country. It all looked very modern! Local liquors were nearly double the price of scotch whiskey, every conceivable electronic gadget was found in the stores of Santiago and even the very poor seemed to manage a Hong Kong toy for their children. But parallel to this, local industry collapsed, employment opportunities that were not mostly of a commercial type became more and more scarce and, finally, when international interest rates were increased and the chilean peso (local currency) could no longer be kept artificially strong, 'modernisation' gave way to 'pauperisation'.

Within the above concept of modernisation there is a host of ideas and values that make up the ideological baggage of the common citizen and are powerfully transmitted by the visual media. For some women it is "beauty" expressed as possession of clothes of a certain kind, cosmetics and exercise provided by specialised private groups. For others it is "comfort" expressed as the possession of innumerable home-gadgets or dispensing with the number of people one must care for (parents, children). For some modernisation means "assertiveness" and "strength" expressed through physical appearance or through power positions; and power is a value achievable through possession of goods and control over people. For others still modernity means rejection of traditional customs and language in favour of dominant languages, the new fashion or the safety provided by acceptance of established authority, regardless of what it upholds.

Modernisation can of course be analysed in its positive meaning which means returning to the purpose of serving human growth, and especially for the very poor the achievement of "decent and dignified human existence."[2] Seen in this light, the process of modernisation aims not at merely reproducing the path of the high-income countries in the pursuit of their present levels of industrialisation but in developing the psychological, social and cultural conditions for applying knowledge to the control of nature and the production of means accessible to all people in a nation.[3] To express this as a desideratum is not difficult. What is difficult, however, is to strike the balance between consideration of the needs of poor groups and less-developed countries on the one side, and the proven means of satisfying these needs as achieved by the developed contexts on the other. This because the concept of modernisation – for better of for worse – is linked to a growing universalization of the meaning given to it by the developed world and enhanced by admiration for its resources and technology. Even when careful consideration of the implications of such a process is undertaken by Third World countries it is not always possible to avoid the pitfalls of false modernisation processes and to undertake genuine, creative actions leading to better living conditions. There are forces other than the goodwill of selected individuals of institutions which set limits to the quality and nature of the process of modernisation. Without entering into the discussion of the causes of poverty and underdevelopment[4] there is little doubt that economic interests both in the industrialised

countries and among economic groups in the poorer locations set the tone for what might be described as a "perverse" dimension of technological development. This dimension takes various forms: it limits the quantity and quality of technological transfer; it sets the targets for fund allocation to research which regardless of where the research takes place will inevitably have an effect on other sections of the world. A frightening example of this is the expansion of the armament race and the so-called "nuclear-deterrence" strategies. It also elaborates a rational justification for the expansion of weapons which finds its way into the media and into the schools. This penetration of the "armament expansion ideology" into schooling is not only achieved through direct input into the curriculum or by use of science-fiction visions of the future as models for political action,[5] but by suppression of attempts to create rational reflections about the issues as are tried in Peace Studies' courses.

The right, acknowledged by the U.N. Declaration, of children to grow up and live in a world of peace with a potential as never before of being fulfilled on account of technological development, paradoxically is seriously threatened both in particular and world-wide settings. We see children who in countries as far apart as Kampuchea and El Salvador know of nothing but a background of war, children who early on in their lives will learn to kill other human beings.[6] There are millions of children who will never live beyond a few years because food and health services are not sufficiently available; or children who will not have part in any of the development (modernisation)

processes of their countries because they will not have access to skills that are only provided through education. In spite of this situation, the intelligence, research skills and resources of the most favoured nations are spent not on the resolution of these problems but on the generation of conditions for destruction of the human race.

In the perspective then of this deformed concept of modernity I would like to look at education of young children in some very poor contexts. In a general way, the concern that guides the approach is whether given cultural, social and psychological conditions, there can be educational stimulation able to lead to a sane process of modernisation or will it simply affirm the negative characteristics of the process.

The questions to be addressed relate not to the quantity or amount of education provided (which we know is measured as attained levels of schooling and as literacy rates), but to the quality of what is offered. Here again the concern is not with all types of educational influences but with those that relate to the formation of the attitudes that underlie social actions and social change. More specifically, my interest is with beliefs and values to which children are exposed in the early years of the primary school.

Beliefs are understood here as conceptions about the self, others and the world (the immediate community, country or world at large). Values relate to the worth assigned and the possibility of commitment that they entail to types of people, ideas, objects and actions. The discussion of both these aspects

is carried out, initially with some reference to the theory of value development; it then looks at the modes of exposure to the values that children have through education and schooling; and at the modes of reinforcement or suppression of beliefs and values which the children bring to the educational situations.

A child's value system. How does it develop?

Underlying discussions about moral education and moral development are a number of theories with differing philosophical as well as psycho/sociological bases. It is not the purpose of this article to discuss these theories, though some reference will have to be made in terms of their contribution to the topic under discussion.

An initial issue to be made explicit refers to the universality versus relativity of values and moral principles. From a philosophical and theological point of view, the universality of values can be established by recourse to a metaphysics of the Absolute. Values are thus seen as universal because they rest or are related to universal forms or to a transcendent being who is those values in an absolute way. However, if one wishes to leave that discussion aside, there is enough support in psychological/anthropological theory to assert that adherence to a same set of basic values is found among very diverse cultural groups. The most important of these positions is linked to cognitive development psychology, especially the work of Jean Piaget[7] and Lawrence Kohlberg.[8] These theories, supported especially by the cross-cultural research of Kohlberg

and associates,[9] contend that human beings in a variety of contexts hold to certain values which are universal in nature; they do so, however, in different ways. There are stages of moral development through which human beings progress at a different pace; these also imply different ways of understanding and of judging how to act in practical situations. The stages are sequential in that the higher one always follows the lower and not vice-versa. But throughout these stages judgments are made with regard to values that can be considered as "universal". Kohlberg explains that these values are not moral rules of the type of the Ten Commandments but rather that they are "universal principles of justice, of reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons".[10]

In explaining how children and adults progress from one stage to another both Piaget and Kohlberg refer to the role of others and more significantly to the role of socialisation processes. In no way is the developmentalist approach one which holds to a spontaneous flowering of moral virtues. Hence Piaget sustains that early childhood, approximately 4 to 8 years of age, is one in which adults define what is good or bad, what is right or wrong and the child accepts as virtuous that which is judged so by the adult. His or her criteria for action is largely heteronomous. However, later on, arising from the interaction with others, children develop a morality and a view of what are values that is not necessarily linked to the adult's views. Progress, therefore, is to a state of moral autonomy. For

example, Piaget considered that for very small children justice is what adults interpret it to be. If a child has been told not do something he will consider, regardless of motives, that it is only fair that he be punished if he violates the rule. Later on, however, justice is seen in terms of relations with others, that is, in relation to rules formulated in a group by mutual consent and which the individual judges to be appropriate and a rightful regulation for action.

In similar terms, Kohlberg holds that moral development implies first, that there is a process of intellectual construction of moral judgments that moves along together with general cognitive development; and secondly, that it is the characteristics of environmental stimulation that affects the normal course of moral development. In other words, he acknowledges the importance of parents or teachers who represent or model the principles and moral reasoning that belong to a higher stage of development. Kohlberg's research does not suggest, however, that their influence is passive; that mere exposure to the "principled adult" will be enough. He insists rather "that stage changes depend upon conflict-induced reorganization"[11] In other words, that active creation of, or pointing-out to situations which suggest a conflict of judgment is a condition for such adult influence in a child's moral development.

The above views suggest therefore that principles of morality (criteria for judgment and action) may be universal and that they relate to considerations or beliefs about the value of human beings, equality of their rights and therefore, the notion

of fair treatment or justice for all human beings. They also
suggest that individuals progress from a state whereby the rules
for action according to these principles are seen as entirely set
and enforced by others to a situation where rules are seen as
arising from mutual relationships and respect for the judgments
and rights of others and the belief in one's own capacity to
judge. If one seeks to move a bit further along the lines of
considering theoretical contributions to an understanding of the
development of morality, one might consider psychoanalytic
theories (though Kohlberg does not). In fact, to say that moral
development is the result of appropriate stage progression under
the influence also of appropriate social stimulation is to
recognise that such stimulation may not always be adequate. The
effects of early childhood experiences upon moral consciousness
or self-concept due to parental or other adult influences has
been of course the contribution of Freudian theories. As we
know, Freud's work offers an explanation of why people do not
attain the autonomous stage of moral development or what he
considered to be rational morality. Freudian concepts include
the analysis of the repression of feelings which relate to
aggression and sex, and the consequent appearance at later stage
in life of guilt feelings which may be unrelated to a person's
actual behaviour. What is mostly important in psychoanalytic
theory for the purposes of our topic is the influence that an
early relationship, the provision of care and affection, may have
on the later ability of a person to reach a rational level of
morality. In other words, beliefs about one's personal worth

(held at an unconscious level and acquired early in life) may affect confidence in our own judgment about how to act, and force us to remain in a conformist, other-oriented stage of moral development. Early educational experiences which affect children's self-perception either, because lacking in affection they repress their frustration and aggression or, because they are not sufficiently exposed to adults who operate at the higher stages of moral development (in Kohlberg's terms) are of crucial significance. In fact, they may have as a social effect the development of what other philosophers and sociologists have called the mass-man, the conformist who is ruled not by principles and inner authority gained in symmetrical social relationships, but by the judgments of external referents.

Before turning to some examples of how children exposed to a poor schooling environment may in fact be the bearers of a stigma to remain with them for a long time, it is necessary to state some position regarding the content of moral principles. At the outset we spoke about beliefs and about values. What we understand by beliefs is the cognitive content, the knowledge-view that an individual considers to have about people, situations, world events and that is related to the worth ascribed to all of these.

It is this knowledge that provides the subject matter for judgments about values. These, in turn, are or may be related to general principles of morality such as those presented by Kohlberg. While it may be safe to talk about principles only it is obvious that these must have concrete existence in qualities

which are ascribed to situations. I would like to list for the sake of understanding what is to come, what are the values that one might link to the three types of general principles acknowledged by Kohlberg.

A fundamental belief in the worth of human beings on account of their humanness leads to belief in the equality of the right to develop and to belief in the need for social organisations which are set up to guarantee such equality. This signifies that individuals must comprehend their growth needs and their rights in the light of the same needs and rights of others and that therefore they must agree on how best to organise society to this end. In more specific terms, one might speak of values that relate to:

a)   the right to exist in a material sense: life, food, shelter, work;

b)   the right to develop intellectually and emotionally, and to exercise these capacities: truth, love/care, respect, freedom of expression and action;

c)   the right to participate in an organised society on equal terms with others: civil liberties, regional and global peace.

Returning to the child and his or her education the questions that arise with regard to beliefs and values relate to what is being done to enable the development of moral judgments based on general or universal principles. Our concern, as will be recalled, is with children in the poorer contexts of Third World societies (as well as in industrialised cities). Our

concern is also with the exposure that children have to values and the mode of reinforcement or suppression of existing values and their concomitant actions. Before proceeding with these aspects it will be well to consider beforehand how the world respects the rights of the poor child, in other word what kinds of valuation of him or herself that underlies the awakening of a child to others and the world.

The rights of children

It is not difficult to assert that if its children were able to reflect upon how the world today applies moral principles to their situation, they would have to judge it as largely immoral. To commiserate with the thousands and thousands of hungry children in Ethiopia and Sudan we have contemplated on TV screens in the past year is one thing; to realise that the threat to their lives could have been averted if warnings of time ago had been attended and actions to offset the danger had been carried out is another. It was around the time of the International year of the Child (1979) that it was said:[12]

> Many Americans were moved to compassion when the New York Times and the Washington Post were carrying banner headlines about famine in Asia and Africa featuring pictures of starving children with wizened faces and bloated bellies. They increased their giving to charities. Catholic and Protestant Churches made world hunger their priority concern. But when the rains came to some parched lands in Africa and Asia and famine headlines and pictures vanished from American newspapers, the public was left with the impression that the hunger crisis was somehow over. But this is not true; chronic hunger still haunts many poor countries.

It was also around the period of preparation for the International Year of the Child that it was estimated from various sources that the cost of drastically reducing malnutrition and even of eliminating the causes of poverty was well within the possibilities of the world's financial capability[13]

There are many forms and ways in which the respect for a child's material needs including the right to live, to be fed and to be housed are not satisfied. Maxine Green talks about the fair treatment that should accompany the act of welcoming a child into an existing community. Such fair treatment she contends entails all kinds of support:[14]

> not simply a loving, responsible family, but the relevant social services (accessible to all) necessarily for sustaining love and responsibility. I think of hospitals, community organizations, child-care centers, playgrounds, neighbourhood theatres and museums, as well as schools. I think of young people involved in child care, - in the arts, in recreation - as well as professionals, paraprofessionals, neighbour- hood people, grandparents, siblings, mothers and fathers.

The children of the very poor often have the warmest of welcomes into the communities they belong: extended family systems provide in many cases more affection and support than is attainable by the child in the nuclear family of the industrial city. But, as the spontaneous feeling of affection is not all that is needed nor can it be sustained when there is prolonged insufficiency of resources, the overall effects of such potentially warm climate are severely diminished.

As these rights of the child who lives in very poor communities are thus effectively not respected by the more affluent groups in their own countries and to an important extent by the world at large, so also are many other superficially or negligibly considered.

The early educational processes

The children, who are the survivors of malnutrition, as Craviotto states, enter school around five to six years of age. Here, it is assumed, their right to the knowledge needed to live, to work and to interact socially will be satisfied. Here, it is assumed, their right to develop as wholesome beings with an adequate concept of themselves and of their capabilities will be stimulated. Here also, it is assumed, they will learn about how to behave towards others and to apply moral principles to concrete situations thus becoming responsible citizens of their societies.

In what follows some indication of the experiences children have of the above educational purposes in the early years of schooling will be provided. The scene is located in primary schools of four Latin American countries (Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Venezuela) which are attended by children from very low socio-economic groups.[17]

How do children develop their self-image

Upon entering school a child may well arrive with all sorts of sentiments: feelings of uncertainty about what and whom he or

The responsibility of that part of the world that has a bigger share in the available resources is not simply to act compassionately at times when the crisis reaches a peak, but to operate constantly on the basis of the right of all children to live and develop. With regard, for example, to the effects of early malnutrition it has been said that these are to impair almost inevitably future intellectual development. however, though there is sound evidence of the extent of these effects, they are by no means the sole contributors for example, to school failure or to other social impairments. In a lucid article on the topic Craviotto[15] has presented evidence that there can be remarkable improvement in the mental performance and physical growth of malnourished children if they are subjected to a stimulating environment before the age of three. However, poor children rarely will have this benefit; moreover when arriving in school they will be judged as undernourished and will have increased, thereby, their chances of poor performance; and the environment at home may further increase the syndrome if the overall family social and economic conditions are miserable. So Craviotto indicates:[16]

> It is apparent from all that has been said that children who survived a severe episode of chronic malnutrition are at a higher risk of failure to profit from the cumulative knowledge available to their socioeconomic group, survival from severe malnutrition may be the event that starts a developmental path characterized by psychological defective functioning, school failure, and subsequent subnormal adaptive functioning.

she will encounter, expectations about a happy time with other children or intense fear at leaving the security of the home environment. In the case of the child from a poor background it will have been made especially clear that going to school is terribly important for his other future and that there must be hard work to please teachers and to reach success. And if no other factors interfere, this child will probably be at least willing to try to perform as expected. initial experiences at school will therefore be very important in this respect. The quality of interactions with teachers and other children will either reinforce the child's initial sense of insecurity or will provide the necessary mixture of success and failure that characterises the experiences that most children have of school life.

To an important extent then the first weeks in school may be responsible for the development or reinforcement in the child of a concept of self which is positive and which should constitute the foundation from which he or she will be able to judge other people and situations. But the early events of school life may also have opposite significance. They may in fact consists of an increasing exposure to failure situations, to public characteri-sations which have pejorative connotations, or similarly to the experience of being ignored. The study which is being considered in this section portrayed a number of situations where children were subjected from the beginning of their school days to a progressive form of downgrading of their self-concept.

In the first year of a Chilean school there were children who had to face the experience of being nicknamed with what in fact was a denigratory label.

Charlie was the "pencil-box fool". Nobody knew exactly where the label had originated though specifically it referred to his pencil-box of which he had at a time been very proud. But the nickname included more than reference to his box; it was really the symbol of his appearance as others saw it. He was the boy who never seemed to have at hand his pencils nor his books. Charlie came from a very poor family, his parents were separated, and his father was an unemployed worker who practically contributed nothing to the household. Yet when Charlie began school he had all the utensils that were required besides appearing as a careful pupil who did everything that was asked from him. Somehow, the situation changed in the course of time, and three months later his teacher was talking of Charlie as "a lazy boy who never brought his coloured pencils to school." Charlie's position in the classroom was awkward; he was seated at the back and could not see the board from there. He was thus seldom able to take part in what was going on ahead of him in the class. As oppression against him mounted with time, his natural shyness made it difficult for him to deal with it, and so reverted to silence. He was now constantly tense, sitting on the edge of his chair and biting his nails or sucking his hand. By mid-year, his teacher had practically given up on him:

> Sometimes one feels defeated when one sees
> that these children don't learn. For
> example, I feel terribly disappointed with

regard to Charlie as I see that there is so
little I can do with him. I don't know what
to do ...!

Through hearing his teacher constantly nag him, through experiencing his peers repeat the same denigratory words expressed by the teacher, and through experiencing his mother's inability to help him (which he interpreted as the cause of his problems) - Charlie gradually lost faith in himself. By the end of the year when the decision had been taken that he should repeat and probably be transferred to another school, Charlie had himself in such low regard as to believe he was virtually useless. He described himself as lazy "because I watch too much 'tele'. Nobody wants to play with me because I'm lazy!"

Charlie's story was several times repeated in classrooms throughout the four countries where school processes were observed. In differing degrees this appeared to signify that children ceased to believe in their own worth and concomitantly vacillated regarding their ability, in specific circumstances, to judge how to act and how and what to believe about the rest of the world. The process of erosion of belief in the self was also reinforced in many classrooms by arbitrariness, nagging and consistent ignoring of the contributions of some children while accepting those of others. In the long run children with these experiences, like Boris in Bolivia, would cease to acknowledge their worth; and like Boris would consider it natural to say, "I'm stupid, I'm an ass," because teacher, mother and the other children had convinced him that such was the case.

What do children learn in school about others and the social world in which they live?

School and before that home interactions provide an initial powerful experience of what are "important" beliefs and values. Children learn at an almost unconscious level what is is that make the worth of other people and of social situations. They acquire the criteria that will eventually allow them to judge the appropriateness of their actions; they experience or try out what it means to be fair - what rules pertaining to their actions belong to a higher or a lower stage in a hierarchy of values.

The observation of these Latin American classrooms allowed the researchers involved to notice what Kohlberg,[18] Jackson[19] and others have called a "hidden curriculum". While teachers overtly sustain concepts of education that uphold the development of personal capacities of judgment, of investigation and encourage responsibility - in practice, their teaching reflects very different values. Thus, the frequent messages received by the children are:

- that authority is largely that of another and must generally be unquestionably accepted;
- that considerations about the welfare of your neighbour are secondary to the demands of authority;
- that external (physical) presentation is of primary importance;
- that there is a ready-made world out there in which one does or does not fit; but presumably one might reach it if sufficient effort is exerted.

We will examine one by one these assertions with some examples for the research that illustrate their significance.

(a) <u>The view of authority</u>   The children of the schools concerned belonged to diverse but equally low-socio-economic backgrounds. They lived in marginal sections of their cities. In some cases, as in Bolivia, their parents spoke a different language from that of the school (Aymara or Quechua versus Spanish). Their parents in a good number of cases were unemployed or sub-employed and their mothers had to do a number of low-paid jobs to "keep things going". For many of these parents, the effort of sending their children to school was immense and responded to their naive faith that schooling would grant their children better life opportunities.

Teachers in the schools where these children attended were seen as all important figures often by parents and almost always by children. The teachers accepted the role. It seemed to them that given the young age of their pupils (though many in a first or second grade could be up to ten years old due to repetition or late school entry), they should model an appropriate concept of authority. They should not only explain their interpretation of the rules by which the world is governed, but also establish the rules they considered to be of benefit to the children's education. Children thus would see in their teachers both legislators and the enforcers of rules. And in fact, in many cases, this is what appeared to happen. Typically, teachers presented themselves as "benign despots" who deserved their pupils' services: "now, you will do this - read this story,

perform this operation - for my sake".   In structuring learning
activities teachers considered procedural rules to be paramount
and required that they be followed exactly:

> Teacher   (to the children): Write with large handwriting
> ... Please write with big letters because it is a
> heading ... and headings, you must not forget,
> should have bigger letters in order to show the
> difference between the heading and the rest of
> what you have.
>
> Teacher   (to a boy): Here are letters that are long
> downwards and others long upwards; do it this way
> as all letters are not the same. Can you see the
> letters?
>
> Pupil: Yes, madam!
>
> Teacher: You must write the letters of the word closer
> together. Can't you see how they have been
> written on the board? ... Why don't you copy
> what's on the board? Now leave the other line and
> underline it ... so that we can show a very
> elegant heading.
>
> Teacher: Did you finish counting the lines?
>
> Pupils (together): Yes, madam.
>
> Teacher: Now you will write with blue ... nice handwriting
> slow, don't run ... You must do letters, not
> hooks.

The teacher's authority exercised in the manner of the
benevolent despot" ran the risk on many occasion of degenerating
into arbitrariness and unfair treatment:

> Cristian (to the teacher): Miss, may I go to the toilet?
> (he walks out of the classroom without waiting for
> permission to go)
>
> Marcela: May I go to the toilet?
> (the teacher signals permission)
>
> Gabriel: May I go to the toilet?
> (the teacher gives a negative signal)

In this sort of climate one could say that children experience very little stimulation leading to autonomous decision-making, which is the foundation for moral decisions. Compliance with an almost omnipotent authority appeared to be accepted by most children as a way of coping with the requirements of school, and presumably might represent the only model of behaviour in social situations considered to be appropriate. In several cases attempts by the children to establish working rules among each other were threatened by the pressures from above to conform to the rules set from that position. The outlying rebels that were encountered in the study stood little chance of success despite their intellectual ability.

(b) <u>Your neighbours' needs</u>   It was not easy to pinpoint specific examples of situations in which children were told that fairness to their peers or consideration of their needs should not take precedence over other rules. However, again it was the number of messages of this kind which were conveyed via instructions or scolding that led the observers to believe that children were being subjected to a distorted view of the intrinsic value of other people. A typical example found often in school situation was acceptance of the 'telling-on' attitude:

<u>Pupil</u>: Miss, Johnny didn't bring his book!

<u>Teacher</u> (to Johnny): Why? Why didn't you bring your book?

An instance such as the one above, repeated over time, conveys a message about what is required to please authority.

Another form of reinforcing distorted views of others was the ease with which teachers allowed "labelling", as referred above, to occur and be exercised by the children with regard to their peers:

> On one occasion as the teacher was telling us about Ed whom she referred to as being 'smelly' and 'dirty', another boy went past Ed and shouted to him: "Hey, what are you doing, you 'smelly'"? When we interviewed Ed he told us about his mates: They call me 'piojento' (licy).

There was little cooperative activities in learning which were encouraged except by those teachers whom the observers considered to be different or out-of-the-norm. On the whole, children were told to look up at those among their peers who were the obedient, docile types and who worked in the manner required and to look away from those who deviated from the norm.

c) The primacy of physical presentation   Something already has been said about this. The implication of the emphasis placed by many teachers on neatness and cleanliness was that other values such as knowledge or truth, imagination or creative attitudes, were all of a secondary nature. The reasons for such an emphasis seemed to lie in the beliefs of teachers about "deprived" background. They considered that the children of the poor, before they can progress in any way, must overcome effects of a home environment assumed to be disorganised and dirty.

> (In a Colombian first year the teacher is conducting a writing-readiness exercise by asking the children to make crosses in a squared notebook. A pupil comes up to the teacher and shows her his notebook).
>
> Teacher: Yes, its beautiful! Go back to your place!

> _Teacher_ (to another pupil): Gustavo, good God! Look
> you've put a cross in one square and not in
> the other. Let me see!
>
> _Teacher_ (to the rest of the pupils): Sit up
> straight! Put your notebooks in the correct
> position so that you can do your task
> correctly!
> (she goes on working with Gustavo)

Such was the value placed on cleanliness and order that mothers were told that their children's difficulties at school were due to dirty appearance:

> (A mother talking about her 'lazy' son):
>
> All they tell me is that he is dirty, that he
> loses his pencils. He leaves the house
> clean, but arrives in school dirty, with his
> clothes torn ... This is why I feel ashamed
> and do not go near her [the teacher].

d) "Fitting into the real world"   Again, not easily pinpointed by any one example was the impression given through the teaching messages that "out there" lay a different world to which children could gain access through their education. That world was not the children's every-day world; not the world of their "dirty homes", not the society of their uncooperative parents ("parents are difficult ... parents are very rude nowadays"). Nor was it the world of their surroundings, the "barrio, the street vendors", their work on Saturdays at the market or everyday after school in the fields or in the city. The world presented to children in these classrooms was one very much unrelated to their own experiences. A glance at the readers used, for example, in Chilean schools would quickly suggest this fact by considering the girl and boy protagonists of the stories. As analysed by Sanchez,[20]   they are middle-class children with a father who

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works and a mother who stays and cares for the home. They go to the farm or to the seaside on vacations, and they have many toys and pets at home with which to play.

Examples were abundant regarding the undervaluing of the children's own environment and the depiction of a very different world accessible, presumably, through effort at school; or not accessible at all if children were judged undernourished or unintelligent:

> (A teacher in Brazil talking about her work):
>
> I worked in Campo Grande, an extremely poor school. I worked with children of all ages and in all grades. It was very tiring, and their level - you know - they had such difficulties on account of their limited IQ precisely because of the kind of socialisation they had. They lived in favelas, shacks, and you should see the ignorance of their parents, their lack of affection ... And now, I'm in a school here in Gavea ... but they are impossible. They have been repeating the same class for the last three years. They are 12, 13 years old. I have some who are schizophrenic and others who have IQ limitations. They can't advance any further, they can't become literate.[21]

Modernisation, Values and the Rights and Education of Young Children

The preceding comments about the above themes need somehow to be tied together to enable reflection about future directions for those responsible of policy and for those willing to pursue research on these matters.

When talking about modernisation as a desirable process for poorer countries and poorer people, what practically is implied is change toward a set of beliefs, of values and of procedures

which are considered to be useful for the improvement of material conditions of life. Unfortunately, experience has shown (particularly as one considers the results of the Decade of Development in the sixties), the application of these beliefs and values is linked to underlying restrictions. These are based on the allowable type and extent of development that will not alter the current state of affairs of developed world economies. Thus, respect for equality may be guaranteed only to the point that the flow of cheap labour products from the Third to the First World is not hampered. This fact allows one to speculate that what dominates throughout is a morality of "ego-satisfaction" and only secondarily, one of responsibility for the "deprived" sectors of contemporary society. The moral consequence of adherence to this dichotomous view of the world (the North-South contradiction) is that millions of people who have no part in the discussions of what should be done to further the better living conditions for themselves and their children are unwitting victims of irresponsible actions decided by those who do have the power:

> The most deprived groups of people who are jammed together at the bottom of the social pyramid cannot even think of their own future; and, for that reason, they can contribute very little to the future of humankind. These are groups and, indeed, whole populations condemned to be nothing but the unconscious slaves of the future, prisoners of a future that others are to determine.

All sorts of ways out could be envisaged[22] but they all hinge on a fundamental shift in the politics of both developed and developing nations toward unleashing the capability of people

to work out a solution to their problems. By means of a ferocious vicious circle the society (with privileges) protects its status quo, it effectively impedes the actions of the less privileged to alter such a condition and then suggests that deprivation is the fault of the poor who do not strive to overcome their conditions.

The above vicious circle operates at the macro political level with a world divided into East and West, and North and South contending camps. It operates at a macro economic level with international consortiums organising social and political life and determining the quality and quantity of needs and their geographical distributions. It determines the quantity and quality of retribution to those who work in the production of goods making it also geographically dependent on the North-South boundaries. But it also operates at a micro level, as within specific social contexts, where those who are participants in power structures and decision-making instances undermine the efforts of the powerless to reclaim their right to partnership.

Such also is the situation of children who because of the world struggles are denied basic conditions of livelihood, or who through oppressive (though not necessarily perverse) educational structures as may be found in schooling (and sometimes home) experiences miss the learning of basic skills and even more significantly, are socialised into submissiveness. To be convinced at an early age that one has very little personal worth, capacity to judge or intelligence to understand reality is a bad outcome of education; it is also the basis for stopping

natural development toward a state of moral autonomy which allows external authority to be rationally judged and situations and their characteristics for human living to be reflectively examined. How else could one explain the passivity if not complacence at injustice as it exists at the decision-making levels of the world today, the attempts to destroy the environment and worse of all, the double standards used by all contending camps to assess violations of human rights.

The education of young children who live in the poorer contexts of the world requires the greatest attention. This means, of course, that social and economic institutions must respond more vigorously to needs, but it also means that the educational factors and processes must be more thoroughly studied in their effects upon not only cognitive but overall affective and moral development. Instead of the obsession with numbers that still haunts the research on Third World schooling, it might be well to examine in cross-cultural projects what sorts of value systems dominate the process of learning to which young children are subjected; what value systems are embedded in the education of those who will teach these children. The model of modernisation offered requires special attention, as young children may grow up thinking that the successful adult as Peccei[23] says in his lucid reflection as President of the Club of Rome, is

> someone who has command over tangible things
> and who understands machines, gadgets, and
> computers, who lives and works in an air-
> conditioned, artificially-lighted building,
> and who drives a high-powered car through
> hair-raising traffic to make contact with
> other machines or gadgets, to dialogue with

other computers, or to disappear into other
science-fiction buildings ...

In view of the concern for a better and more human world,
where modernisation means equal right to live, to work, to enjoy
leisure, and to offer and receive care, the focus of educational
change must alter. We are witnessing, on account of world
economic recession, a recession also of education expansion.
Resources which appeared to be bountiful in the sixties are being
reduced significantly. For the poor in the Third World this has
severe consequences; for its children and therefore for the
future it may be fatal. Recommendations for policy should thus
include special attention to pre-school education (there is
evidence of its positive effects [24]), to delivery systems for
improving the acquisition of basic skills in the first years of
school. But funding agencies and policy-makers should not side-
step the issue of the quality of the education for the very poor.
Schooling for those who manage to experience it should not mean
the first step to an experience of failure:

> it is necessary to ensure that schools are
> well adapted to cope with large individual
> differences in ability, that they provide
> opportunities for success for all pupils and
> that poor scholastic attainment is used as an
> indication of a need for special help rather
> than the opprobrium combined with a message
> of inevitable continuing failure.
>
> ...
>
> the social characteristics of a school may
> either facilitate or impede children's
> psychological development. The challenge is
> to ensure that this experience (compulsory in
> most parts of the world) is to the child's
> benefit.[25]

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Modernisation in its positive sense is dependent on the ability of individuals and social groups to put to use their intelligence in the invention of modes of making their world more habitable for human purposes. Many young children in today's world will not have this ability developed, in spite of all declarations to the contrary, if resources are not allocated and effort is not placed in the improvement of their early educational experiences.

References

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    is referred to "poor people in any region or place in the
    world". Cf. Manning Nash, Unpublished Agenda. The Dynamics
    of Modernization in Developing Nations (Boulder, Westview
    Press, 1984), p. IX.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. For an interesting discussion on these approaches as well as
    a statement of position see John G. Taylor, From
    Modernization to Modes of Production. A Critique of the
    Sociologies of Development and Underdevelopment. Atlantic
    Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979.

5. Toronto's Globe and Mail (July 25, 1985) referring to an
    American Congressman who acknowledges "that he finds
    inspiration for his political vision in such films as Star
    Wars, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom and First Blood".
    He declares: "I think this is what America is all about ...
    Americans at a deep glandular level, want a political
    leadership that legitimizes and gives focus to this sense of
    buoyancy".

6. On the plight of children in a war-ridden country, see
    Charles Clements, Witness to War. An American Doctor in El
    Salvador (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1984).

7. Jean Piaget, The Moral Judgment of the Child. Transl.
    Marjorie Gebain (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

8. For a clear synthesis of Lawrence Kohlberg's position see
    his article on "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for
    Moral Education" in Brenda Munsey (ed.), Moral Development,
    Moral Education, and Kohlberg. Basic Issues in Philosophy,
    Psychology, Religion and Education (Birmin Gham, Ala.:
    Religious Education Press, 1980).

9. Kohlberg and his associates have carried out cultural
    studies on the stages of moral development in Taiwan, in a
    Malaysian aboriginal village, two villages in Mexico and
    Turkey, and compared these results with those from an
    American sample.

10. Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development", p. 93.

11. *Ibid*. p. 47.

12. Cf. David S. Burgess, "An International Perspective on Children's Rights" in Patricia A. Vardin and Irene N. Brody (eds.) <u>Children's Rights. Contemporary Perspectives</u> (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979), p. 101.

13. *Ibid*.

14. Cf. Maxine Greene, "An Overview of Children's Rights. A Moral and Ethical Perspective', in Vardin and Brody, <u>Children's Rights</u>, p. 14.

15. Cf. Joaquin Cravioto, "Effects of Early Malnutrition and Stimuli Deprivation on Mental Development" in Spiros Doxiadis (ed.), <u>The Child in the World of Tomorrow. A Window into the Future</u> (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979).

16. *Ibid*., p. 361.

17. The following section is based on results from an ethnographic study carried out in a number of primary schools in Bolina, Columbia, Chile and Venezuela. 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. The study was supported and is being published by the International Development Research centre (Ottawa, Canada). Co-reseachers with B. Avalos were A. Tezanos, G. Lopez, M. Crespo and I. Hernàndez.

18. Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development".

19. Cf. P.W. Jackson, <u>Life in the Classroom</u> (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).

20. Cf. Nelson Sanchez, A content analysis of children Primary School readers. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University College Cardiff, 1982).

21. Cf. Vera Wrobel, Ceremoniais e Mitos: Um estudode relacoes escola-clientela. Unpublished M.Sc. thesis, (IUPERJ, Rio de Janeiro, 1981).

22. Cf. Aurelio Peccei, <u>One Hundred Pages for the Future. Reflections of the President of the Club of Rome</u> (New York: Mentor, 1982), p. 134.

23. *Ibid*., p. 179.

24. Cf. <u>Preventing School Failure</u> presents a series of research reports on the effects of the pre-school experiences over later school achievement in a number of Latin-American and other Third World Context (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1981).

25. Cf. Michael Rutter, "Psychological Issues in Planning for the Future" in Doxiadis (ed.), <u>The Child in the World of Tomorrow</u>, p. 129.