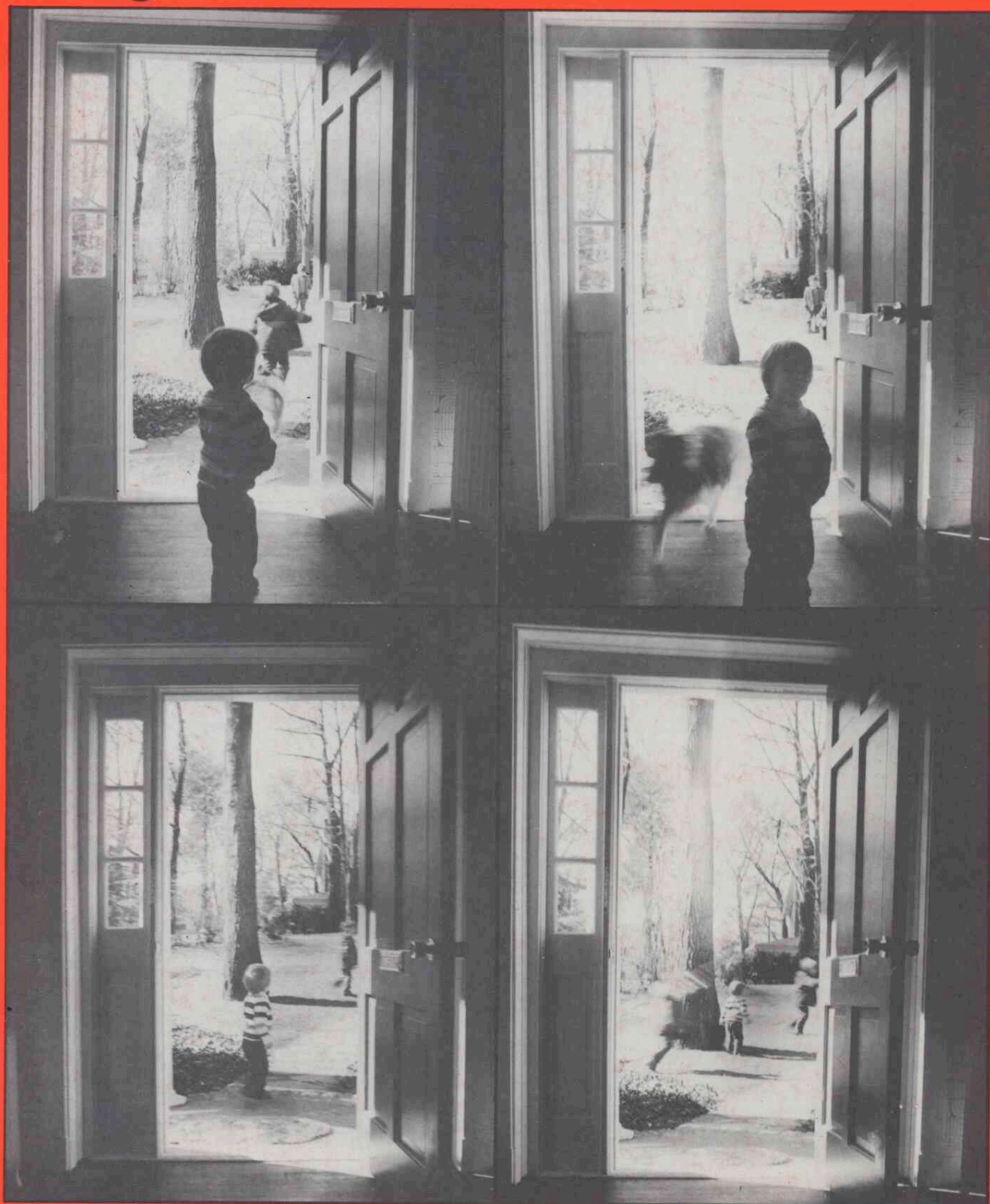


Beyond the Front Door



Beyond the Front Door

Subject matter of unit:

Values and expectations are transmitted to children in personal interactions with people outside the immediate family.



Introduction

In the Park

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A Growing Sense of Self

The Expectations of Others

Peer Influence

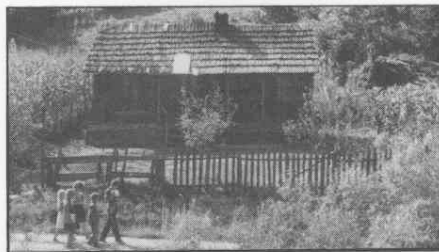
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Children at School

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illustration: Linda Popper

What messages do people beyond a child's immediate family give him or her?

What sense do children make of messages transmitted in interactions with people beyond the front door?

How do children respond to messages from people beyond their immediate families?

Introduction

Family is an early and powerful influence in a child's life. It is usually not long, however, before "outsiders" begin to enter into children's experience, communicating what attitudes and behaviors are expected of him or her. You might imagine a child's growing social world as a series of circles.

The three circles could be defined as follows:

The first circle: the womb. A controversial issue among experts is whether or not the baby has behaviors, attitudes, interactions, and experiences before birth.

The second circle: the immediate family. Who is present in this circle?

Third circle: a child's immediate world beyond the front door. Who may be present in this circle? Will differences in physical environment also affect a child's behavior and attitudes? In what ways?

journal activity: the family circle

Let your memories run free. What do you think are some of the behaviors and attitudes you learned from your immediate family during your first four or five years? What were some of the routines of your home? Try to recall conversations or experiences you had with your parents and siblings and/or other family members who were important in your early life. You need not write full sentences. Just put down the words or phrases that come to you as you try to remember the sights, sounds, smells and feelings of the early years of your life.

discussion activities: the third circle

- In small groups, discuss: Who was one of the first people outside your immediate family who had an effect on you? What was the effect? Brainstorm: What are some of the differences in personal interactions that a child might encounter outside the immediate family?

- As a class, discuss: What new ground rules do children need to learn for interacting with people beyond their immediate family?

film viewing: "around the way with kareema"

This film shows some of the weekend activities of a four-year-old, both at home and in her neighborhood. Kareema is the youngest daughter in her family. Her family is close, and still very central to her life. Her three older sisters, Debbie, Celeste, and Felicia, help to take care of her. Kareema, in turn, has a role in helping to care for the little boys, Jamal, Hasib, and Amin.

As you take a glimpse at Kareema's life, look for

- the values and behaviors she is learning in her family,
- the kinds of people she encounters beyond her family,
- what she may be learning from them.

In the Park

a reading & observation

When children begin to have contact with people outside their homes, they quickly learn how others expect them to behave:

- with adults and other children;
- with strangers, acquaintances, and friends;
- with possessions, public property, and the environment.

In short, by exposure to the expectations of others, children add to their sense of what is acceptable in their society.

In a public place, like a park, playground, or supermarket, it is easy to observe how people raise their children for life beyond the front door. About twenty years ago, anthropologist Martha Wolfenstein studied French childrearing practices in the parks of Paris. Her observations and conclusions were included in the book *Childhood in Contemporary Cultures*. As you read this selection, keep these thoughts in mind:

- The children whom she watched may now be parents themselves. Do you imagine they are behaving as their parents did?
- What might encourage them to raise their children as they were raised?
- What new influences might affect them, and cause them to act differently? What kinds of differences would you expect to see?

french parents take their children to the park*

In Parisian families it is a regular routine to take the children to the park. This is a good situation in which to observe how French children play, their relations with one another and with the adults who bring them to the park....

For the French each family circle is peculiarly self-inclosed, with the family

members closely bound to one another and a feeling of extreme wariness about intrusion from outside. This feeling is carried over when parents take their children to play in the park. The children do not leave their parents to join other children in a communal play area. In fact, there are few communal play facilities—an occasional sand pile, some swings and carrousel, to which one must pay admission and to which the children are escorted by the parents. The usual procedure is for the mother (or other adult who brings the children to the park) to establish herself on a bench while the children squat directly at her feet and play there in the sand of the path. Where there is a sand pile, children frequently fill their buckets there and then carry the sand to where mother is sitting and deposit it at her feet....

There seems to be a continual mild anxiety that possessions will get mixed up in the park. Mothers are constantly checking on the whereabouts of their children's toys and returning toys to other mothers. One woman hands a toy shovel to another, saying: *C'est à vous, madame?* [Is this yours, madam?] Toys seem to be regarded as the possessions of the parents, and mislaid ones are usually restored to them. While parents are concerned to keep track of their own child's toys, they seem particularly upset if their child has picked up something belonging to another and are apt to slap the child for it. This happens regardless of whether there has been any dispute and where the owner may be quite unaware that another child has picked up something of his.

The following incidents illustrate these attitudes. A girl of about two is holding a celluloid fish belonging to a

* Reprinted from Margaret Mead and Martha Wolfenstein, *Childhood in Contemporary Cultures*, by permission of the University of Chicago Press. Copyright © 1955 by the University of Chicago.

boy of about the same age. Though the boy makes no protest, the attendant of the girl scoldingly tells her to give it to him, pushes her forward, and after the girl has handed the fish to the boy, hustles her back to her own bench.

A girl of about two has picked up a leather strap from a neighboring group. Her nurse reproves her, takes her by the hand, and returns the strap. A little later a boy of about the same age, belonging to this neighboring family, plays with the little girl, picks up her pail, and keeps it while the little girl is fed by her nurse. The boy's grandmother becomes aware that he has the pail, hits him on the buttocks, scolds, and, taking him by the hand, returns the pail to the girl's nurse. In front of the nurse she repeatedly hits the boy about the head and ears. . . .

Among American children issues of ownership versus sharing tend to arise when two children dispute about the

use of a toy. What is considered desirable is that the child should learn to share his playthings, which are his property, with others. French children seem to be taught something quite different. Toys are familial property, and those belonging to each family must be kept separate. Just as the children with their parents or other familial adults form a close little circle in the park, so their belongings should remain within the circle. The child who brings into this circle something from outside seems to be introducing an intrusive object, which arouses all the negative sentiments felt, but from politeness not directly expressed, toward outsiders. At the same time it is an offense to the outsiders, whose belongings are thus displaced, and restitution and apologies to them are required. Also, as French adults are much preoccupied with property and with increasing their own, they have to ward off the temptation to do so by illegitimate means. The child's easy way of picking up others' things may



Henri Cartier-Bresson, France: The Seine, 1955. Magnum

evoke in adults impulses to take which they strive to repress in themselves and which they therefore cannot tolerate in the child.

Friendly behavior between children of different families is not encouraged by the adults. . . .

secret solidarity of brothers

In the following incident one can observe the friendly relation of two brothers which becomes more outspoken when they get by themselves, away from the adults. The two boys, of about six and seven, very neat, dressed alike in blue jerseys and white shorts, are playing together in the sand of the path. Their father sits talking with two women, who appear to be friends of the family, and the boys' sister, about a year older, sits on a bench with her doll. As the younger boy moves into the father's field of vision, the father slaps his hands and face, presumably because he has got himself dirty. This puts an end to the sand play; the two boys sit down, subdued, on the bench, and, as the father turns away, the older presents the younger with a cellophane bag—a gesture of sympathy and compensation. After a time the father suggests to the girl that the children take a walk around the park, and they immediately set out. On their walk the boys keep close together, leaving the girl to herself. As they get farther away from the father, the boys begin putting their arms around each other's shoulders. They become much more animated and point things out to each other as they go. As they get nearer to the father again on the return path, they drop their arms from each other's shoulders, drift apart, and again become more subdued. Having returned, they seat themselves quietly again on the bench.

French children show a great readiness to play with children younger than themselves, in a way which contrasts strikingly with the behavior of American children. It is typical of American boys particularly to be intolerant of the

"kid brother" who wants to tag along and get into the big boys' game when he isn't good enough. An American boy of seven will complain that he has no one of his own age to play with; the neighbors' little boy is six. In America there tends to be a strict age-grading, which the children themselves feel strongly about.

acceptance of the little ones

In contrast to this, French children appear interested in younger children and ready to accept them in their games. A boy of eight or nine will play ball with a smaller boy, a five-year-old or even a two-year-old, without showing any impatience at the ineptitude of the younger one. The two children may be brothers or may belong to families that know each other. A slender blond boy of about seven seems completely absorbed in a little girl of two or three whom he follows around, bending over to speak to her. The mothers of the two children are acquainted with each other, and the boy and his mother both shake hands with the little girl's mother when she leaves the park. The boy looks quite disconsolate without his little friend; eventually, at his mother's suggestion, he picks up his scooter and slowly pushes off on it.

Such interest, particularly on the part of boys, in younger children differs markedly from the American pattern, where interest in babies becomes strictly sex-typed for girls only and out of keeping with the boy's ideal of masculine toughness. . . .

Where the American child is expected from an early age to become a member of a peer group outside the family, for the French child the family and the contacts which the adults make with other families remain decisive. While, from the American point of view, this may appear restrictive, it also facilitates friendly relations between older and younger children, including notably affectionate quasi-paternal feelings of older boys toward small children. . . .

grownups stop children's aggression

French children are not taught to fight their own battles, to stick up for their rights, in the American sense of these terms. If one child attacks another, even very mildly, the grownups regularly intervene and scold the aggressor. The child who is attacked is likely to look aggrieved or to cry, to look toward his mother or go to her. He does not hit back, nor is he encouraged to do so. An attack is thus not a challenge which must be met by the attacked to save his self-esteem. It is a piece of naughty behavior to be dealt with by the adults.

In the following instances one can see how quickly adults intervene in even very slight manifestations of aggression. Among a group of small children playing on a sand pile, a girl of about two and a half takes a shovel away from her four-year-old sister and walks away with it, looking back in a mildly provocative way. The older girl remains seated and simply looks dismayed. The younger one is already going back to return the shovel when the mother comes over and scolds her, calling her *vilaine*. The little one gives back the shovel, and the two resume their digging. . . .

In (another) incident . . . where a little girl stepped on a little boy's sand pie, the boy looked toward his grandmother with an expression of amazement and distress. The grandmother promptly launched into a biting verbal attack on the little girl: *Vilaine! Vilaine fille! Tu commences maintenant à faire des sottises!* [Naughty! Naughty girl! You are being very nasty!] A little later when another girl was throwing sand into the sand pile, the grandmother scolded her repeatedly, telling her it could get into children's eyes. The girl's mother, a little way off, then chimed in and told the girl to stop. Protective as she was of her little grandson, the grandmother was equally ready to interfere in an aggressive act of his. Thus,



Eugene Atget, *Fête de la Villette*, ca. 1907 Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York

when he was pushing another boy, who did not seem to notice the rather gentle pressure, the grandmother called to him to stop, that he would make the other boy get a *bo-bo* [bump or sore], and the grandson stopped.

Thus what French children learn is not the prized Anglo-Saxon art of self-defense or the rules that determine what is a fair fight. What they learn is that their own aggression is not permissible. . . .

restraint in motor activity

To an American visitor it is often amazing how long French children stay still. They are able to sit for long periods on park benches beside their parents. A typical position of a child in the park is squatting at his mother's feet, playing in the sand. His hands are busy, but his total body position remains constant. Children are often brought to the park in quite elegant (and unwashable) clothes, and they do not get dirty. The squatting child keeps his bottom poised within an inch of the ground but never touching, only his hands getting dirty; activity and getting dirty are both re-

stricted to the hands. While sand play is generally permissible and children are provided with equipment for it, they seem subject to intermittent uncertainty whether it is all right for their hands to be dirty. From time to time a child shows his dirty hands to his mother, and she wipes them off. . . .

childhood is not for fun

For the French, enjoyment of life is the prerogative of adults. Childhood is a preparation. Then everything must be useful, not just fun; it must have an educational purpose. . . .

At the carousel, as soon as the ride began, an old woman with spectacles and red hair done up in a bun on top of her head and wearing an old-fashioned gray coat (she seemed to me a benevolent witch), handed out to each child in the outer circle a stick (*baguette*). She then held out to them a contraption which dispensed rings and encouraged them to catch the rings on their sticks. Throughout the duration of the ride, the old woman directed to the children an incessant didactic discourse, urging them to pay attention and work very



Park Scene, 1890

hard to catch the rings. *Attention! Regarde ton travail! Regarde bien, chou-chou!* [Look out! Watch what you are doing! Watch carefully, dear!] *Au milieu*, indicating with her finger the middle of the ring at which the child should aim. *Doucement!* [Gently!] When a child used his stick to beat time instead of to catch rings, the old woman scolded him for this frivolity. . . . Thus, even on the carrousel, children have a task to perform. The elders direct, commend, and rebuke them. They are not there just for fun.

The paradox from the American point of view is that the French grow up with a great capacity for enjoyment of life. The adult enters fully into the pleasures which have not been permitted to the child. There seems to be a successful realization that pleasure is not taboo, but only postponed. The song of Charles Trenet, *Quand j'étais petit* [When I was little], ends with the triumphant, *On n'est plus petit!* [One is no longer little]—everything is now permitted. It remains one of the puzzles of French culture how this effect is achieved: that the restraints to which children are subjected have only a temporary influence and do not encumber the adult with lasting inhibitions.

If we compare Americans and French, it seems as though the relation between childhood and adulthood is almost completely opposite in the two cultures. In America we regard childhood as a very nearly ideal time, a time for enjoyment, an end in itself. ☆

questions for discussion

- Think back to when you were four or five. Who might have been the one to take you to a park or public place? How would you have reacted to other children? How would the person with you have encouraged you to act?
- How do you think the way that these French adults treated aggression in their children affected them? How do you try to handle the aggression of children at your field site?
- How do French adults treat other

issues that arise “at the park”? How do you treat those issues? Why?

observation activity

Choose a place where parents (or caregivers) and children are spending time together in public—a park, a children’s shoe store, or a museum, for example. Spend about half an hour watching what they do and what they say to one another. Try to jot down as many details and incidents as you can.

Here are some things to think about while observing:

- What do the adults encourage? How? What do they discourage? How?
- Over what issues do adults exert control?
- What kind of attention do children try to get from adults?
- How much attention do children pay to other children? What kind of interactions occur?

Childrearing practices vary from country to country; for instance, French and American children are raised somewhat differently. In the United States, where many cultures have come together, such variations can be seen. If possible, go to another neighborhood in your city or town, or to an area where you think childrearing attitudes and behaviors might be different from those among people you know, and make a second observation. Choose a setting as similar to your first one as possible—a supermarket if you chose that the first time, a playground if you chose that the first time. Follow exactly the same procedure in doing your observation.

Share your observations with your classmates. Then look back over the statements Wolfenstein made about:

- what adults encouraged and discouraged,
- children’s behavior patterns.

As a class or individually, what generalizations can you suggest about present-day childrearing in your own neighborhood based on what you and your classmates have observed?

From the people around them, children receive messages that tell them who they are and what they can expect to grow up to be. As they accept some of these messages and ignore or reject others, they build their sense of who they are and of the kind of person they want to become.

A Growing Sense of Self

The Expectations of Others

There are many people outside of the immediate family who know children in early childhood. Children know them in their various capacities—relative, neighbor, babysitter, storekeeper, clergyman, etc.—and learn what behavior each expects of them. In the next three selections, children are exposed to the expectations of doctors.

As you meet these doctors, consider the following questions:

- What kinds of childrearing practices do the doctors expect from the children's parents or caregivers?
- What behavior and attitudes do they expect from the children?
- How do the children react to the doctors and to the messages they transmit? What sense do the children make of the messages?

mini-dialogues

In the following reading,* written in 1971, an American mother describes her three-year-old's experience with doctors in France.

**From a letter by Jane McMahon Kennedy.*

25 rue Saint-Louis Toulouse, France

Between December 28th and January 6th, Mona visited or was visited by doctors three times. On December 28th, the family doctor was called to investigate Mona's slight fever and sore throat because the pediatrician was away for the Christmas holidays. She conversed slowly and calmly with Mona while examining her. She told Mona all about her own little girl of the same age. As she examined Mona's ears, she very seriously told her, "You are lucky you don't have ten ears the way spiders do, or I would have to examine them all." Her attention was centered on Mona and Mona's feelings, rather than on me, the dotting, over-anxious mother.

A similar conversation occurred between Mona and her pediatrician a week later, when Mona had a relapse of her sore throat. As this doctor opened the door to his office, he attempted a greeting in English, "Come to Mona." As he lay Mona down to examine her, he asked her if she had received a doll for Christmas. Mona said, "Yes." Mona then picked up a doll the doctor had in the office. It wore no clothes and had a mop of badly dishevelled hair.

"She's well dressed, isn't she?" the doctor commented. Mona, a bit intimidated, said, "Yes." "She has lots of hair like I do," the near-bald doctor added. Very solemnly, Mona again said, "Yes."

I told the doctor that in general Mona was a fussy eater. Glancing at Mona, who was munching a large, crusty piece of French bread, he said that it was very bad to let Mona eat between meals. My attempt to justify myself by telling him that Mona had not had time to eat breakfast (since, when I had called him right after getting up, he had told us to come to his office immediately) was cut short by a stern command, "No more bread." Mona was very annoyed when I took the bread from her. She assumed her pouting expression with lower lip thrust out. She refused to say good-bye to the doctor, and very wisely he did not insist.

Two days later, he came on a house call because Mona had a fever of 104°. As he went up the stairs, he said, "It's not Mama coming up the stairs," for Mona's calls revealed that she thought it was me. As he examined Mona, he told her that she was sweet, but when she threw up on him after he had peered down her throat, he exclaimed, "Oh-la-la."

Both doctors impressed me, because they paid more attention to their little patient than to her mother.

film viewing: “at the doctor’s”

A child’s sense of self grows out of three awarenesses:

- individuality—I am myself, different and separate from others.
- similarity—But who else am I like, and in what ways?
- expectations of others—How do others see me and what do they expect of me?

As you watch this film, look for instances in which the adults define their visions of each of the children, and watch the ways in which the children respond to the adults’ view of them.

The Reinforcement Theory

Psychologist B. F. Skinner believes that people’s behavior is shaped by positive reinforcement (praise and reward) and negative reinforcement (blame and punishment). Children learn at a very early age that other people are a source of such encouragement and discouragement, and their sense of self is influenced by these responses to their behavior.

- What examples of positive and negative reinforcement can you find in the film “At the Doctor’s”?
- Can you give an example of reinforcement that you have given a child at your fieldsite? What effect did it have?
- Can you think of any reinforcement you have seen children give each other? What happened?

questions for discussion

- What qualities does the doctor see in Mark? in Jill? What messages do you see him giving each child?
- How does Mark respond to messages about himself? Which does he accept? How does Jill handle messages about herself as an individual person? as a female? as a sister?



“At the Doctor’s”

“big enough to go alone”*

Children encounter many people beyond the front door. Some they know personally, like neighbors or family doctors. Others they encounter only briefly, yet brief encounters can also leave their mark.

In the following episode,* two children from an Irish family living in New York City in the 1930s meet a public health doctor and nurse, and the vaccination scar is not all they receive.

Francie was seven and Neeley six. Katie had held Francie back wishing both children to enter school together so that they could protect each other against the older children. On a dreadful Saturday in August, she stopped in the bedroom to speak to them before she went off to work. She awakened them and gave instructions.

“Now when you get up, wash yourselves good and when it gets to be eleven o’clock, go around the corner to the public health place, tell them to vaccinate you because you’re going to school in September.”

Francie began to tremble. Neeley burst into tears.

“You coming with us, Mama?” Francie pleaded.

“I’ve got to go to work. Who’s going to do my work if I don’t?” asked Katie covering up her conscience with indignation.

Francie said nothing more. Katie knew that she was letting them down. But she couldn’t help it, she just couldn’t help it. Yes, she should go with them to lend the comfort and authority of her presence, but she knew she couldn’t stand the ordeal. Yet, they had to be vaccinated. Her being with them or somewhere else couldn’t take that fact away. So why shouldn’t one of the three be spared? Besides, she said to her conscience, it’s a hard and bitter world. They’ve got to live in it. Let them get hardened young to take care of themselves.

“Papa’s going with us then,” said Francie hopefully.

“Papa’s at Headquarters waiting for a job. He won’t be home all day. You’re big enough to go alone. Besides, it won’t hurt.”

Neeley wailed on a higher key. Katie could hardly stand that. She loved the boy so much. Part of her reason for not going with them was that she couldn’t bear to see the boy hurt . . . not even by a pin prick. Almost she decided to go with them. But no. If she went she’d lose half a day’s work and she’d have to make it up on Sunday morning. Besides, she’d be sick afterwards. They’d manage somehow without her. She hurried off to her work.

Francie tried to console the terrified Neeley. Some older boys had told him that they cut your arm off when they got you in the Health Center. To take his mind off the thing. Francie took him down into the yard and they made mud pies. They quite forgot to wash as mama had told them to.

They almost forgot about eleven o’clock, the mud pie making was so beguiling. Their hands and arms got very dirty playing in the mud. At ten to eleven, Mrs. Gaddis hung out the window and yelled down that their mother had told her to remind them when it was near eleven o’clock. Neeley finished off his last mud pie, watering it with his tears. Francie took his hand and with slow dragging steps the children walked around the corner.

They took their place on a bench. . . . Behind the frosted glass door where the terrifying business was going on, there was a steady bawling punctuated by a shrill scream, resumption of the bawling and then a pale child would come out with a strip of pure white gauze

*Abridged from pp. 121-125 in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith. Copyright 1943, 1947 by Betty Smith. By permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

about his left arm. His mother would rush and grab him and with a foreign curse and a shaken fist at the frosted door, hurry him out of the torture chamber.

Francie went in trembling. She had never seen a doctor or a nurse in all of her small life. The whiteness of the uniforms, the shiny cruel instruments laid out on a napkin on a tray, the smell of antiseptics, and especially the cloudy sterilizer with its bloody red cross filled her with tongue-tied fright.

The nurse pulled up her sleeve and swabbed a spot clean on her left arm. Francie saw the white doctor coming towards her with the cruelly-poised needle. He loomed larger and larger until he seemed to blend into a great needle. She closed her eyes waiting to die. Nothing happened, she felt nothing. She opened her eyes slowly, hardly daring to hope that it was all over. She found to her agony, that the doctor was still there, poised needle and all. He was staring at her arm in distaste. Francie looked too. She saw a small white area on a dirty dark brown arm. She heard the doctor talking to the nurse.

"Filth, filth, filth, from morning to night. I know they're poor but they could wash. Water is free and soap is cheap. Just look at that arm, nurse."

The nurse looked and clucked in horror. Francie stood there with the hot flamepoint of shame burning her face. . . .

After the doctor's outburst, Francie stood hanging her head. She was a dirty girl. That's what the doctor meant. He was talking more quietly now asking the nurse how that kind of people could survive; that it would be a better world if they were all sterilized and couldn't breed anymore. Did that mean he wanted her to die? Would he do something to make her die because her hands and arms were dirty from the mud pies?

She looked at the nurse. To Francie, all women were mamas like her own

mother and Aunt Sissy and Aunt Evy. She thought the nurse might say something like:

"Maybe this little girl's mother works and didn't have time to wash her good this morning," or, "You know how it is, Doctor, children *will* play in dirt." But what the nurse actually said was, "I know. Isn't it terrible? I sympathize with you, Doctor. There is no excuse for these people living in filth." . . .

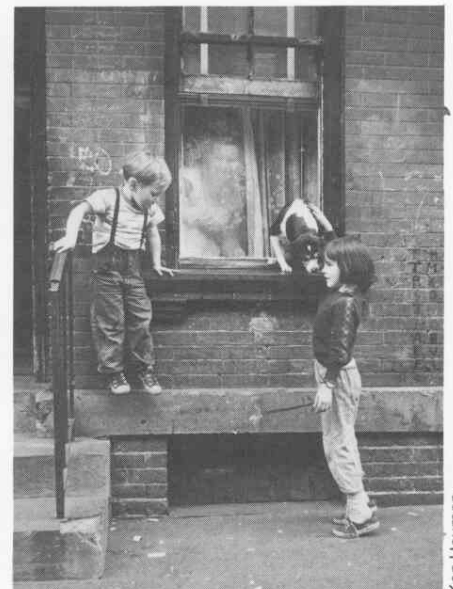
When the needle jabbed, Francie never felt it. The waves of hurt started by the doctor's words were racking her body and drove out all other feeling. While the nurse was expertly tying a strip of gauze around her arm and the doctor was putting his instrument in the sterilizer and taking out a fresh needle, Francie spoke up.

"My brother is next. His arm is just as dirty as mine so don't be surprised. And you don't have to tell him. You told me." They stared at this bit of humanity who had become so strangely articulate. Francie's voice went ragged with a sob. "You don't have to tell him. Besides it won't do no good. He's a boy and he don't care if he is dirty." She turned, stumbled a little and walked out of the room. As the door closed, she heard the doctor's surprised voice.

"I had no idea she'd understand what I was saying." She heard the nurse say, "Oh, well," on a sighing note. ☆

questions for discussion

- What messages did these interactions contain? messages from the mother? the doctor? the nurse? and from the children?
- What expectations were at work here? What did the mother expect of Francie? What were the doctor's and nurse's expectations? What did Francie expect of the nurse and why?
- What does Francie expect of herself? Why?



Ken Heyman



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In the two readings that follow, adults recall early experiences that affected their sense of personal worth. Like Francie, they felt “labeled” by people whom they encountered outside the protection of their families.

As you read, try to answer the following questions:

- How did the writers feel at the time about themselves?
- How did they feel about the people from whom they received these messages?
- How did they respond?

learning about discrimination*

While I was still too young for school, I had already learned something about discrimination. For three or four years my inseparable playmates had been two white boys whose parents ran a store across the street from our home in Atlanta. Then something began to happen. When I went across the street to get them, their parents would say that they couldn't play. They weren't hostile; they just made excuses. Finally, I asked my mother about it.

Every parent at some time faces the problem of explaining the facts of life to his child. Just as inevitably, for the Negro parent, the moment comes when he must explain to his offspring the

facts of segregation. My mother took me on her lap and began by telling me about slavery and how it had ended with the Civil War. She tried to explain the divided system of the South—the segregated schools, restaurants, theaters, housing; the white and colored signs on drinking fountains, waiting rooms, lavatories—as a social condition rather than a natural order. Then she said the words that almost every Negro hears before he can yet understand the injustice that makes them necessary:

“You are as good as anyone.”

My mother, as the daughter of a successful minister, had grown up in com-

**Reprinted from Martin Luther King, Stride Toward Freedom. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964. Copyright © 1958 by Martin Luther King, Jr.*



parative comfort. She had been sent to the best available school and college and had, in general, been protected from the worst blights of discrimination. But my father, a sharecropper's son, had met its brutalities at first hand, and had begun to strike back at an early age. With his fearless honesty and his robust, dynamic presence, his words commanded attention.

I remembered a trip to a downtown shoestore with Father when I was still small. We had sat down in the first empty seats at the front of the store. A young white clerk came up and murmured politely:

"I'll be happy to wait on you if you'll just move to those seats in the rear."

My father answered, "There's nothing wrong with these seats. We're quite comfortable here."

"Sorry," said the clerk, "but you'll have to move."

"We'll either buy shoes sitting here," my father retorted, "or we won't buy shoes at all." Whereupon he took me by the hand and walked out of the store. This was the first time I had ever seen my father so angry. I still remember walking down the street beside him as he muttered, "I don't care how long I have to live with this system, I will never accept it."

And he never has. I remembered riding with him another day when he accidentally drove past a stop sign. A policeman pulled up to the car and said:

"All right, boy, pull over and let me see your license."

My father replied indignantly, "I'm no boy." Then pointing to me, "This is a boy. I'm a man, and until you call me one, I will not listen to you."

The policeman was so shocked that he wrote the ticket up nervously, and left the scene as quickly as possible. ☆



Ruthie at seven

the people to be like*

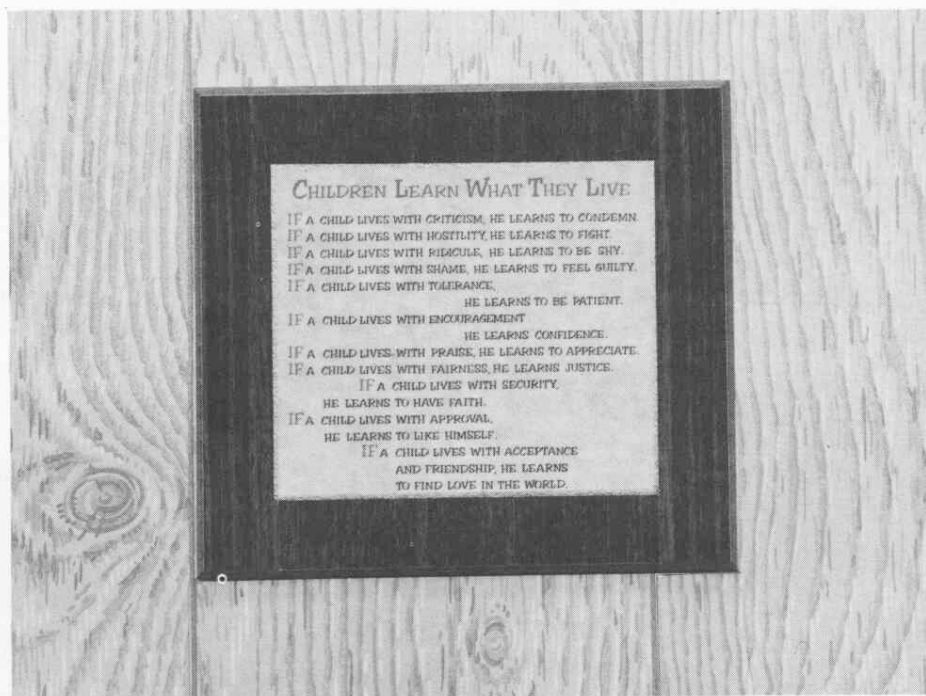
Every time they saw each other that week in late August — which was fairly often, since we lived around the corner from each other — my grandmother and mother discussed whether to buy or to make the dress. It was finally decided that my mother would make the dress herself so that it would be just what they wanted for me to wear that first day of kindergarten.

It was so important to them — how I looked — and they felt it would make a great deal of difference to a teacher — especially for a little girl with an Italian name. They so wanted her to think well of me.

As my mother dropped me off at the front door of the great, austere brick building that morning, she said, “Remember, Ruthie, be a good girl and do exactly what the teacher says.” How I wished I were back in my living room with my wide-eyed younger sisters, who were probably by this time having a cup of tea with grandma.

I tried to sit carefully in the circle so as not to mess the new dress which the teacher hadn’t noticed yet, but which I hoped she would acknowledge in some way. I didn’t want her to think I was just another one of those Italian kids I’d heard about who didn’t amount to much in school. I was so shy — I couldn’t think of a way to tell her all the things stored in my head that I had heard endlessly repeated around family cups of tea by my parents and aunts and uncles who all lived close by: That we may be Italian, but we were Protestant after all, and didn’t that mean we were almost like everybody else? And that my parents had been to school, too — to college. But somehow if your name was Italian, all those things didn’t matter. You still were not, well, not like the people to *be* like.

But even though I couldn’t say any of those things to the teacher, when she



Robert Hower

asked us to *do* something, I was so pleased! Now I could show her that I was really able, that my family was respectable, and that I was like those other people whose houses looked different from ours — just kind of plain and nice, instead of with fussy gardens in front, like ours.

The teacher asked us each to place a chair in front of us, and gave us each a long, black shoelace. She had us put it around the chair back, and then tried to teach us to tie a bow. How I struggled! I was shaking and felt hot all over. While I was still trying hard, the teacher said, “Some of you have done beautifully. All of you who have done so well can go down to the gymnasium to play. The others of you will have to stay here to practice.” Such a little thing, it seems in retrospect, but how well I remember the wave of shame that spread over me! Already I had failed. The teacher was calling out the names of those who could go to the gym. I couldn’t make my arms move, my fingers try. But a hard core of something rose in my throat and somehow stopped the sob. “Never,” I thought, “never again will I be caught this way. Next time and every time after that I will do it *first*. This is no way to get to be like the people to be like.”

But what could I tell my waiting mother and grandmother? They would be so disappointed. I planned my first conscious subterfuge that moment: I would tell them nothing about the incident. I guess I never learned more during any school day after that than I did during my first one there. ☆

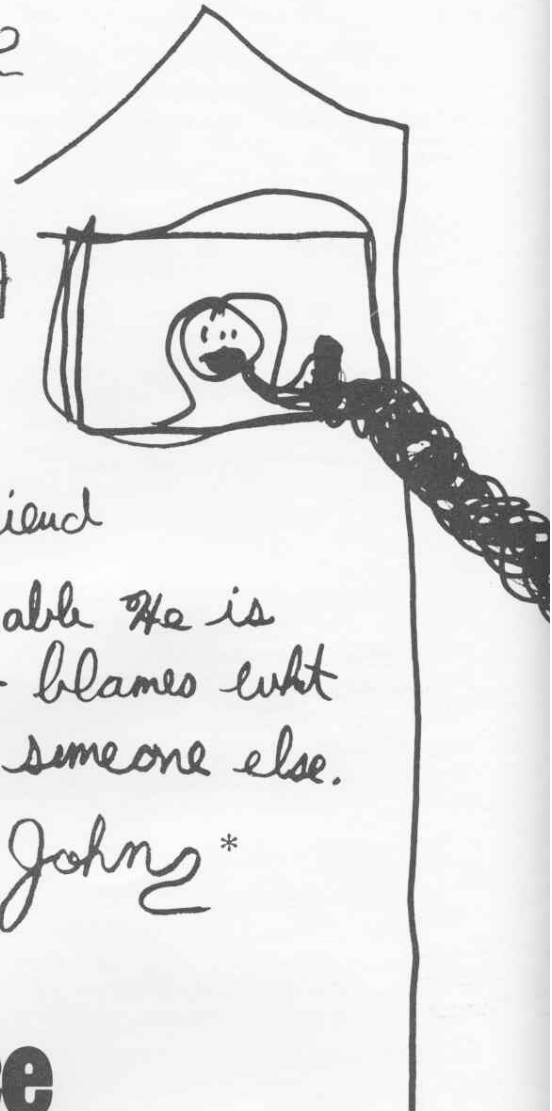
questions for discussion

- What messages did each of these children receive from family members? from people outside the family? What feelings and reactions did each have?
- The experiences of Martin Luther King, Ruth Creola, and Francie Nolan occurred earlier in this century. Do you know of any experiences similar to these that have happened to present-day children?
- How can a parent or person working with young children help them understand such experiences?
- How can you help teach young children not to label or look down on others?

* A memory retold by Ruth Creola.

* Copyright © 1971 What Is a Friend?, by Lee Parr McGrath and Joan Scobey. Reprinted by permission of Essandess Special Editions, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

A FRIEND IS SOMEONE
WHO IS SOMEONE
WHO IS SOMEONE
WHO YOU PLAY WITH



A Doctor is your
friend when you are
sick. A policeman is your
friend when you are
lost, but I don't
know about Dentists.
Charlie*

My Friend
He is dependable He is
someone who blames what
you did on someone else.

Johny*

Peer Influence

what is a friend?

Around age four or five, other children begin to become an important influence in a child's life. From their friends, children receive many messages about themselves, about how to behave, about what to value.

- What do you think it means to a small child to have a friend?

Here are some children's definitions of "a friend." As you read each one, ask yourself:

- What does this child expect from a friend?
- What sense of self does the definition suggest?

A FRIEND
IS NICE

I Love
friends

What is a friend

A person who is always
there whether you want them
or not.

Carol O.

a friend is
Someone who
Sometimes as
arguments ~~with~~ with you

activities

- **Collection:** Ask children you work with what a friend is and what they like about friends. Collect their comments in a notebook or on a tape recorder.
- **Observations:** (1) Make a chart of the friendships you have observed at your field site. Describe several of them. What seems to have drawn

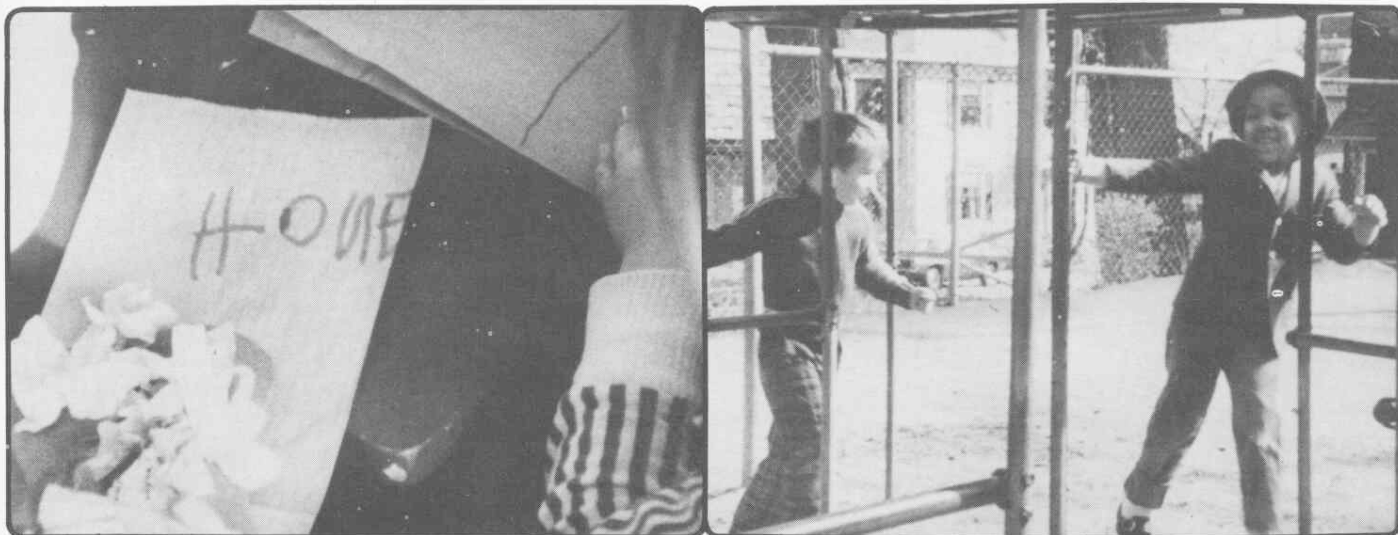
children together? How important do these friendships seem to be to the children involved?

Choose one such friendship to observe closely for a few weeks. What messages can you detect being exchanged? What influences do they seem to have on one another? on other children?

(2) Look for instances of friendship between older and younger children. What role does each child play in this sort of friendship? Do you think

it is different from friendships between children close in age? Explain.

- **Memories:** By jotting for five or ten minutes in your journal, try to recall as many details as you can about one of your earliest friends. Share your memories with a partner, or in a small group. Discuss: How did you and your friend influence one another? Afterward, write a few paragraphs about what you now think about that early friendship.



howie at school

Children at School

School is a special place for children, quite different from other situations that they have encountered. At home, at the doctor's, or with people they meet, children are being socialized as individuals. At school, children are being socialized as part of a group.

glimpses through film

Presented in two short films, "Oscar at School" and "Howie at School," are actions and activities that are typical of the children's interactions at their preschools. These are real glimpses of the children, shown in the sequence in which they occurred one day. While viewing these films, look at the incidents as a series of socializing experiences that the children go through. Look at the boys' actions and interac-

tions to see how they are affected by the people around them, and how they, in turn, affect others.

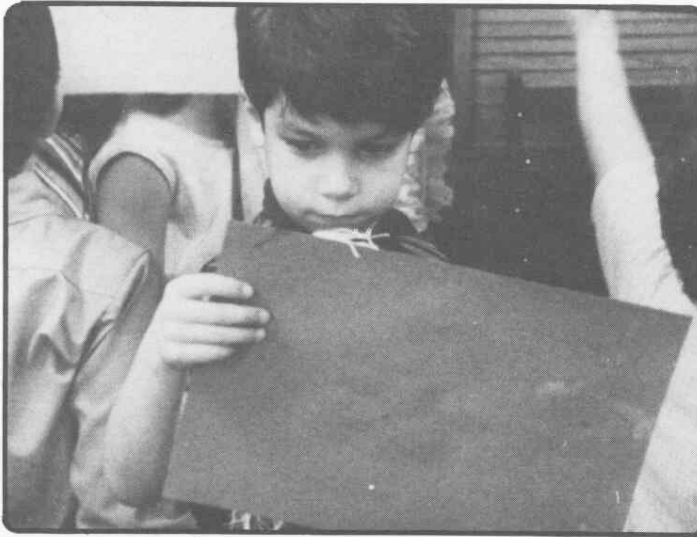
questions for discussion

- What is expected of each child at school? What does each expect of others?
- What message does each get from his peers? from his teacher?
- How does each respond to the various messages? What self-image do any of these incidents seem to encourage?
- What values and behaviors does the school foster? How?

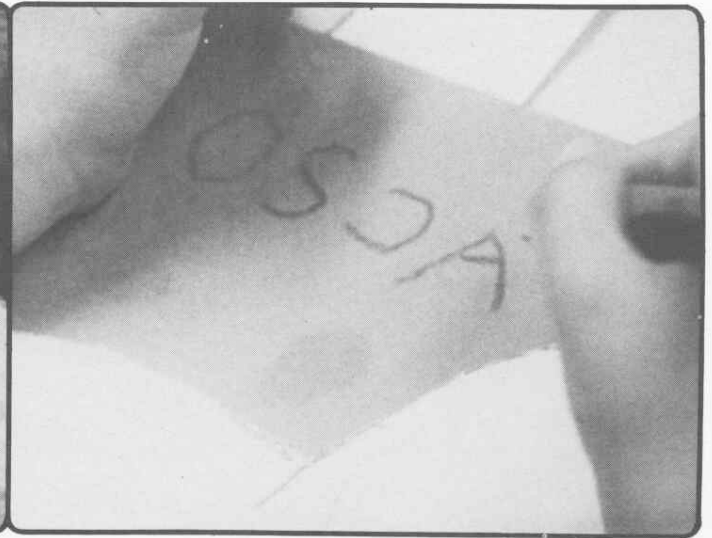
a longer look

The film "Rachel at School" allows you to follow a child's interpersonal relationships during a morning at her preschool. By recalling "Rachel at Home," you can consider how this child's experience at home may or may not influence her interactions at school.

Before viewing the film, you might discuss the following questions:



oscar at school



- How much is a child the same or different in a new context (outside of home)?
- What kinds of interaction does each activity area of a fieldsite offer for social learning?
- To what extent can a fieldsite reflect the values of a child's home?

After viewing the film, consider: In this film, Rachel responds to the presence of her peers and adults. Do you feel that she acts differently with them than she does at home with her family? In what ways is she different? In what ways is she the same?

Read through a portion of the transcript from the film, which follows.

Try to trace the interactions between the three girls that begin over use of the tracks.

"it would be more nicer"

Jessie: I want to go.
 Rachel: Here, Jess.
 Jessie: I want to go. She's not letting me go. Tell her to let me go.
 Rachel: Kara, will you please let Jessica go? If you hit me, I'm going to hit you. Kara's not letting Jessica go through and I just tried to get her to do it but instead she hit me and I tried to hit her back.

Kara: I'll tell my Mumma you hit me.
 Jessie: I want to get through, ooooh.
 Kara: I won't let you come to my house anymore. Just let Stephen and, ummm, Jake. That's all. Not you two.
 Rachel: Well, then, I'm not going to let you come to my house for 86 weeks.
 Jessie: I can't come through.
 Kara: I'm going to move away from you.
 Jessie: Good, then I can go through.
 Rachel: Well, then I'm going to wreck the track.
 Jessie: I want to go through.
 Kara: I'm going to take that away.

Rachel: You better not.
 Jessie: See what you just did. I'm angry at you now, Rachel.
 Kara: I got the track first. You can't play. I am going to play by myself.
 Rachel: Well then, we're not going to let you play with us ever again in the housekeeping corner.
 Kara: It's everybody sharing. It's *everybody's* toys to *share*. I'll be your friend if you let me play.
 Rachel: Come on, Kara, you can play, too.
 Jessie: But not with us, right?
 Rachel: Yes, she can. She's our friend from now on.
 Jessie: She's not going to be our friend.
 Rachel: She's always going to be near me.
 Jessie: But remember, Kara, our lockers are near each other.

Kara: I want her near *me*, Jessie.
 Rachel: Come on, Jessica. It would be more nicer if we be her friend.
 Jessie: Yes, but we're not, right?
 Rachel: I am.
 Jessie: Anyway, so am I. Where's another stick?
 Rachel: I don't know, Jessie. I've two of them.
 Jessie: Why don't we share?
 Rachel: One each, when I'm finished.
 Jessie: Ooooh, I smell popcorn!

questions for discussion

- How does each child cope with the situation?
- What do they expect of each other? of adults?
- How do you think this experience might have contributed to each child's sense of self?

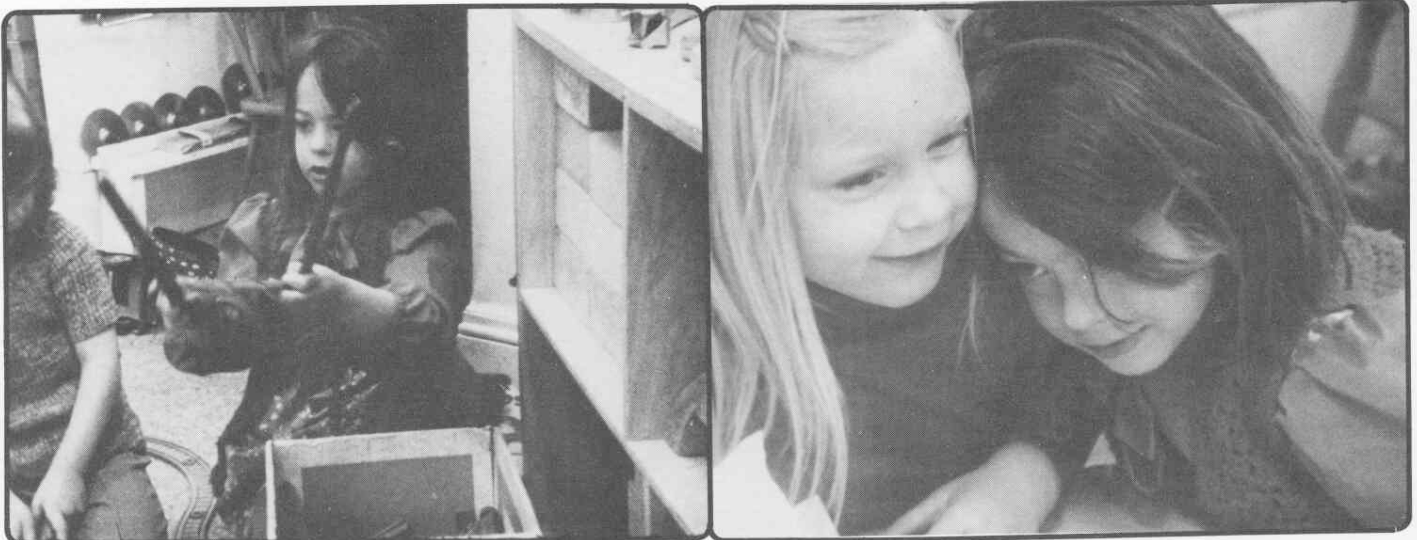
Adults influence and shape the behavior of children. The teachers and other adults are not often visible through the lens of the camera, but they are directly or indirectly responsible for the children's classroom.

- What roles did adults seem to play at this preschool? If you have had a similar experience at your fieldsite, share it with the class and explain the role that you played.

The values children have been learning at home and the values encouraged at their preschool influence the ways they behave toward one another.

- What values did you see being encouraged in this film?
- To what extent does Rachel's school experience seem to reflect values you saw in her home life?

rachel at school



Matching Messages

mona goes to school*

As children are absorbing values and patterns of behavior at home, outside their homes they are exposed to new messages about how to behave, what to expect from others, and who they are. Some of these messages confirm and strengthen the messages of home. Others introduce the child to new ideas and possibilities, or may even contradict the values and expectations of the child's family.

most powerful new source of social messages. In the following letter from Mona's mother, you will read about Mona's first days in her French nursery school. As you read, look for what seem to be some of the mother's values and expectations for her child. Compare them to what seem to be some of the values and expectations of the school.

* From a letter by Jane McMahon Kennedy.

Life at school is often a child's

In France, children are expected to be in school at a very early age, a policy encouraged both by general opinion and by government policy. At two and a half, Mona seemed to be looking forward happily to her first day of school. She had fantasies about slides and swings, and seemed to think that Marie (my close friend) and I, as well as five-year-old Jacques (Mona's only close friend, but a dear one) would all be "in school" with her.

When I enrolled her, the "Directrice" firmly told me that I was to leave Mona at the door of the school, regardless of her reaction. But I was worried that this method of "separation" would be traumatic for Mona at first—she would suddenly be without me, along with thirty other children, some or all of whom might be crying. So I followed the example of a friend who planned to postpone the first day for her two small boys. The day before school was to start I left a message at the school that Mona would start a week late, offering the half-valid excuse that Mona had just returned from Spain with us and needed some time to adjust to the French language again.

On the day when school was starting for the other children, I talked with the Directrice, an imposing woman in her mid-fifties, whose determined voice and gait are somewhat frightening even to adults. She firmly dismissed my fears, and told me to bring Mona the following morning. I meekly agreed, partly because I was afraid of the Directrice, and partly because I wanted to make sure Mona got a warm welcome at the school.

I asked, "What if she cries?" The Directrice replied, "They all cry the first day." I questioned, "Do they cry all the first day?" She answered, "Never, of course not."

When I happily commented that there were only 27 children in Mona's class, she quickly assured me that there would be 60 by the end of the year, and seemed pleased about that!

The following morning Mona trotted happily along the sidewalk with Jacques and shouted, "Slide, slide" upon approaching the school. At the door of the school we were met by a teacher's assistant. At first she told me that I could accompany Mona to her room, but upon suddenly realizing that it was Mona's first day of school, she changed her mind and very decisively, though not roughly, led Mona toward her classroom.

Mona began to cry, but not loudly. She did not look back at me, but she was being led so quickly maybe she didn't have time. I noticed that several other children were in tears. The teachers were sympathetic but firm, and tried to divert the children's attention with cheerful words. The "No Entry Parents" rule is never ignored.

Mona spent the day at school. Later, when I arrived to pick her up, she was crying. Her teacher told me that she had started to cry only when she saw me, and Jacques said that when he peeked in at Mona at recess she had not been crying.

I asked Mona if she had had fun. She answered, "Oui" (yes). I questioned, "What did you do today?" She answered, "Bateau" (boat). When I suggested that Mona say good-bye, she waved happily and shouted, "Bye-bye" across the yard to her teacher.

As we left the school, Marie stopped to question the Directrice about the school lunch program. Mona sat happily on a low stone wall. When we had finished talking with the Directrice, she approached Mona abruptly and talked to her rather emphatically for about ten seconds. Mona, who tends to resist abrupt approaches, pushed the Directrice back with her hand and looked uncertainly towards me.

The Directrice did not scold but told her, "You should say, 'Bonjour, Madame.'" The French, I have learned, generally expect a great deal of politeness from children.

I told Mona gently—and not too convincingly—that it is not nice to push, and then told the Directrice that in a month Mona would probably be speaking French. The Directrice ended the conversation at this point by saying that Mona was stubborn!

Mona's next two days at school have been calm, at least in arrival and departure. At home she has shown resistance to the idea of going, but once the door is in sight she is content to leave me.

Generally Mona seems quite happy with school. Her teacher appears gentle and understanding, from the few words we exchange when I pick Mona up. The school is bright and cheerful with many dolls, doll houses, teddy bears, and brightly colored beads. There is a large round sandbox in the school yard. Mona is delighted to point out her new friends to me. She has a smug, secretive air about school when questioned, and though her responses may be positive or negative, they are always accompanied by smiles.

 questions for discussion

- What values and expectations is Mona experiencing?
- How does she seem to handle them?
- Can you remember any occasions in your childhood when you encountered values or expectations different from those you learned at home? What did you do?

when messages conflict

On the Commentaries record, Guadalupe Quintanilla, Director of Mexican-American Studies at the University of Texas, suggests four areas where a child from a Mexican-American home frequently experiences conflicting values and expectations.

How to Show Respect: "If you scold a child from a Mexican-American home, the child will tend to look down and the teacher doesn't understand . . ."

The Family as a Unit vs. Reliable Attendance: ". . . The parents of the child from a Mexican-American home want him to stay home if someone is ill in the family . . . We want to be together when something happens at home."

Dependence vs. Independence: ". . . In the Mexican-American household, the child doesn't necessarily learn to do for himself — only because he is trying to consider everyone else in the family, everyone else's feelings."

Teachers: ". . . If the teacher tells you something, it goes . . . Then the child finds that the teacher is trying to destroy what he has learned at home. He is confused."

The following statements might be made to a child at school. How do you

think each of these might make a child feel? Why?

"Look at me when I talk to you."

"We missed you yesterday. Did you go away with your family?"

"At your age you should be able to button your boots."

"Now, I want you to decide what you will do today."

 interview activity

Interview a few parents to get their views on what they expect preschools to do for their children. You might ask the following questions:

- What social skills do they hope their child will learn at school?
- What changes in behaviors or attitudes have they noticed in their child since he or she started school?
- What do they think caused each change? How do they feel about the changes?

You can then interview the children's teacher, using the same questions, that you used for the parent interviews. Compare the values and expectations of the children's homes and school.

- What agreements are there? What differences?

If the children are at your fieldsite, ask *yourself* these questions:

- Who else besides the teacher and the parent has opinions about how the child should act? What messages do they convey?
- Which influences seem strongest for the child in a specific incident that you can recall? Is that influence always strongest?

 questions for discussion

- Do you remember any time when your goals for a child were in conflict with those of the teacher or parent? What did you do?
- What do you think can be done in

those areas where parent and preschool expectations and values differ?

Professor Quintanilla urges that teachers of minority children be trained by people of that minority. She explains, ". . . many things you learn in life, and you feel, and feelings are not learned in books."

- What do you think of her recommendation?



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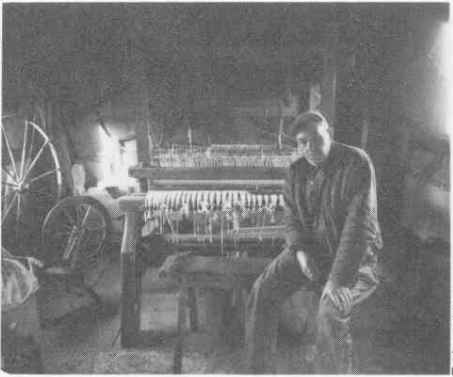
Robert Hower



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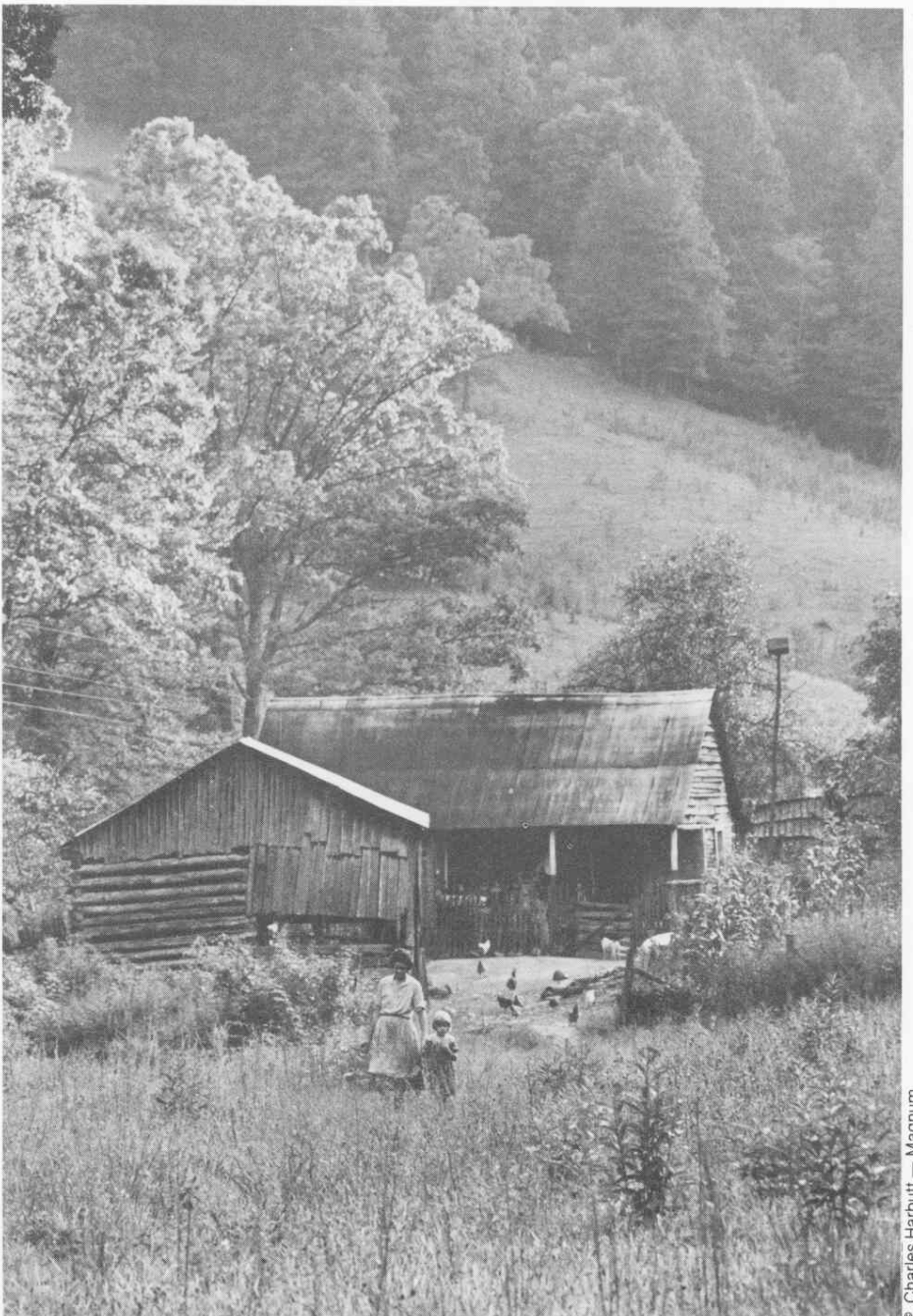
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“Somehow we must all learn to know one another.”

Observing in Depth

Throughout this course you have been asked to observe children and write up what you see them do and how you see them grow. You have probably discovered that there are many ways to observe and write up behavior.

Robert Coles is a child psychiatrist who has studied not only children's illnesses and problems, but also people's lives. He has developed a special way of observing people. Here are some of his thoughts on his method of observation.

coles's method*

... when I started seeing particular black and white people caught up in a phase of historical change I also became determined to do something else as well: ... observe how people live and conduct their affairs and try to make do — those who live out from day to day their own version of history by trying to deal with particular burdens; historical, social, political, and awful economic burdens. . . .

What sounds like a series of random and unrelated studies or explorations has over a decade gained enough coherence for me to feel I can set down on paper some descriptions of particular lives and some discussions and observations that are tied to those lives and others very much like them. I have used years of conversations and experiences in many counties of many states. The heart of the work has been the thirty families I have visited and worked with and watched and come at times to feel almost joined to — as a doctor, a companion in travel, a friend

No family have I now, as I write, known less than six years; some I have known over a decade, and the great majority from seven to nine years. I have, additionally, talked with many, many others whose lives touch upon, bear upon, connect up with, have to do with the people in these thirty families: teachers, employers, merchants, county officials, sheriffs, so-called community organizers — and of course they range from advocates to opponents, from helpers to completely unsympathetic onlookers

I have tried to be discreet; I have tried to respect the desires and attitudes of the individual families concerned. I have asked them (only after I have known them for months, I hasten to add) whether I might record some of our talks, so that I can have them, as it were, and keep them and go over them

I also take photographs of the people I visit . . . to hold near me and help guide my mind (and I hope my heart) a little nearer to what I guess has to be called the essence (words simply fail here) of particular lives. And there does come a time, after a few years of visits

and more visits, talks and more talks, good talks and rather dismal ones, when something seems to have happened, “clicked,” . . . so that a mountaineer can say: “Well, I guess I know you a small bit and you know me the same, and I sure hope you go and tell those people out over beyond those hills what we're *really* like. But the funny thing is, I don't believe I know myself what it is we're really like, and I don't believe you'll ever know, either, to be frank with you.”

The aim of all these trips and visits can be put like this . . . to approach, to describe, to transmit as directly and sensibly as possible what has been seen, heard, grasped, felt by an observer who is also being constantly observed himself — not only by himself but by others, who watch and doubt and fear and resent him, and also, yes, show him kindness and generosity and tenderness and affection

Later, when it is time to say goodbye, there still may be plenty of “gaps” around, a “cultural” gap, a “generational” one, a “socioeconomic” one; but there is also in visitor and visited a touch of sadness, a feeling that attachments have taken place, that separations are painful.

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an appalachian family

The "Allens" were one of the families who shared their lives with Dr. Coles. These brief excerpts from Volume II of *Children of Crisis* illustrate how Coles shares with us what he has learned through his work. Learning a little about the Allens may also help you to understand more about how the world beyond the front door affects what families teach their children. As you read, ask yourself:

- Who are some of the people beyond the Allens' front door?
- What values, expectations, or attitudes toward them do you think the Allen children may be learning?

Mr. Allen: A lot of cars come riding through here, you know. Everyone wants to look at the hills, and the bigger the waterfall you have to show, the better. They'll stop their driving and ask you directions to things, if you're down there on the main road, and I always try to help. You see, we're not against those people. It's beautiful here, right beautiful. You couldn't make it better if you could sit down and try to start all over and do anything you want. If they come here from clear across the country and tell you how they love what they've seen and they want to see more, I'm ready to help them, and I always act as polite as I can, and so do they, for the most part. The ones I don't like one bit are different. They don't want to look and enjoy your land, like you do yourself; no sir, they want to come and sit down and tell you how sorry you are, real sorry, and if something isn't done soon, you're going to "die out," that's what one of them said . . .

A year ago I heard someone talk the very same. He came to the church and we all listened. He said we should have a program here, and the kids should go to it before they start school. He said the government would pay for it, from Washington. He said they'd be teaching the kids a lot, and checking up on their health, and it would be the best thing in the world. Well, I didn't see anything wrong with the idea. It seemed like a good idea to me. But I didn't like the way he kept repeating how bad off our kids are, and how they need one thing and another thing. Finally I was about ready to tell him to go home, mister, and leave us alone, because our kids are way better than you'll ever know, and we don't need you and your kind around here with nothing good to say, and all the bad names we're getting called. I didn't say a word, though. No, I sat through to the end, and I went home. I was too shy to talk at the meeting, and so were a lot of the others. Our minister was there, and he kept on telling us to give the man a break, because he'd come to help us. Now, I'm the first to admit we could stand some help around here, but I'm not going to

have someone just coming around here and looking down on us, that's all, just plain looking down on us — and our kids, that's the worst of it, when they look down on your own kids.

My kids, they're good; each of them is. They're good kids, and they don't make for trouble, and you couldn't ask for them any better. If he had asked me, the man out of the East, Washington or someplace, I would have told him that, too. We all would have. But he didn't want to ask us anything. All he wanted was to tell us he had this idea and this money, and we should go ahead and get our little kids together and they would go to the church during the summer and get their first learning, and they would be needing it, because they're bad off, that's what he must have said a hundred times, how bad off our kids are, and how the President of the United States wants for them to get their teeth fixed and to see a doctor and to learn as much as they can. You know what my wife whispered to me? She said, he doesn't know what our kids have learned, and still he's telling us they haven't learned a thing and they won't. And who does he think he is anyway?

Describing Mrs. Allen, Dr. Coles writes:

She was thirty and, I thought, both young and old. Her brown hair was heavily streaked with gray, and her skin was more wrinkled than is the case with many women who are forty or even fifty, let alone thirty. Most noticeable were her teeth; the ones left were in extremely bad repair, and many had long since fallen out — something that she is quite willing to talk about, once her guest has lost *his* embarrassment and asked her a question, like whether she had ever seen a dentist about her teeth. No, she had never done anything like that. What could a dentist do, but take out one's teeth; and eventually they fall out if they are really no good. Well, of course, there *are* things a dentist can do — and she quickly says she knows there must be, though she still isn't quite sure what they are, "those things." For a se-

cond her tact dominates the room, which is one of two the cabin possesses. Then she demonstrates her sense of humor, her openness, her surprising and almost awesome mixture of modesty and pride.

Mrs. Allen: If you want to keep your teeth, you shouldn't have children. I know that from my life. I started losing my teeth when I started bringing children into the world. They take your strength, your babies do, while you're carrying them, and that's as it should be, except if I had more strength left for myself after the baby comes, I might be more patient with them. If you're tired you get sharp all the time with your children

I make corn bread every day, and that's filling. There's nothing I hate more than a child crying at you and crying at you for food, and you standing there and knowing you can't give them much of anything, for all their tears. It's

unnatural. That's what I say; it's just unnatural for a mother to be standing in her own house, and her children near her, and they're hungry and there isn't the food to feed them. It's just not right. It happens, though — and I'll tell you, now that you asked, my girl Sara, she's a few times told me that if we all somehow could eat more, then she wouldn't be having trouble like me with her teeth, later on. That's what the teacher told them, over there in the school.

Well, I told Sara the only thing I could tell her. I told her that we do the best we can, and that's all anyone put here on this earth can ever do. . . .

Now, if Sara's daddy made half that teacher's salary in cash every week, he'd be a rich man, and I'd be able to do plenty about more food. But Sara's daddy doesn't get a salary from no one, no one, you hear! That's what I said to her, word for word it was. And she sat up and took notice of me, I'll tell you. I

made sure she did. I looked her right in the eyes, and I never stopped looking until I was through with what I had to say. Then she said, "Yes, ma'am," and I said that I didn't want any grudges between us, and let's go right back to being friends, like before, but I wanted her to know what the truth was, to the best of my knowledge and nothing more. She said she knew, and that was all that was said between us.

Dr. Coles explains: In point of fact Mrs. Allen is usually rather silent with her children. She almost uncannily signals them with a look on her face, a motion of her hand, a gesture or turn of her body. She doesn't seem to have to talk, the way so many mothers elsewhere do, particularly in our suburbs. It is not that she is grim or glum or morose or withdrawn or stern or un-giving or austere; it is that she doesn't need words to give and acknowledge the receipt of messages. The messages are constantly being sent, but the children,





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rather like their mother, do things in a restrained, hushed manner — with smiles or frowns, or if necessary, laughs and groans doing the service of words.

The Allens speak eloquently of where they live.

Mr. Allen: I was out of here, this county, only once, and it was the longest three years of my life. They took me over to Asheville, and then to Atlanta, Georgia, and then to Fort Benning, and then to Korea. Now, that was the worst time I ever had, and when I came back, I'll tell you what I did. I swore on my Bible to my mother and my father, in front of both of them, that never again would I leave this county, and maybe not even this hollow . . .

When you ask me to say it, what we have here that you can't find anyplace else, I can't find the words. When I'd be in Georgia and over in Korea my buddies would always be asking me why

I was more homesick than everyone in the whole Army put together. I couldn't really answer them, but I tried. I told them we have the best people in the world here, and they'd claim everyone says that about his hometown folks. Then I'd tell them we take care of each other, and we've been here from as far back almost as the country, and we know every inch of the hollow, and it's the greatest place in the world, with the hills and the streams and the fish you can get. And anyone who cared to come and visit us would see what I mean, because we'd be friendly and they'd eat until they're full, even if we had to go hungry, and they'd never stop looking around, and especially up to the hills over there, and soon they'd take to wishing they could have been borned here, too . . .

And Coles tells about some ways in which the parents pass on these feelings to their children: His children love the

hollow, and maybe they too will never really be able to leave. They are unmistakably poor children, and they need all sorts of things, from medical and dental care to better and more food; but they love the land near their cabin, and they know that land almost inch by inch. Indeed, from the first days of life many of the Appalachian children I have observed are almost symbolically or ritualistically given over to the land. One morning I watched Mrs. Allen come out from the cabin in order, presumably, to enjoy the sun and the warm, clear air of a May day. Her boy had just been breast-fed and was in her arms. Suddenly the mother put the child down on the ground, and gently fondled him and moved him a bit with her feet, which are not usually covered with shoes or socks. The child did not cry. The mother seemed to have almost exquisite control over her toes. It all seemed very nice, but I had no idea what Mrs. Allen really had in mind un-

til she leaned over and spoke very gravely to her child: "This is your land, and it's about time you started getting to know it."

What am I to make of that? Not too much, I hope. I was, though, seeing how a particular mother played with her child, how from the very start she began to make the outside world part of her little boy's experience. What she did and said one time she has done and said again and again in that way and in other ways.

She loves her children and she loves her property. When she holds an infant in her arms she often will sing. She sings songs about hunting and fighting and struggling, songs that almost invariably express the proud, defiant spirit of people who may lack many things, but know very clearly what they *don't* lack.

Mrs. Allen: I tell the kids there's more to life than having a lot of money and a big brick house, like some of them have down towards town . . . The other day I was trying to get my oldest boy to help me, and he was getting more stubborn by the minute. I wanted him to clean up some of the mess the chickens make, and all he could tell me was that they'll make the same mess again. I told him to stop making up excuses and help me right this minute, and he did. While we were working, I told him that the only thing we had was the house and the land, and if we didn't learn to take care of what we have, we'd soon have nothing, and how would he like that. He went along with me, of course. But you have to keep after the child, until he knows what's important for him to do. ☆

questions for discussion

- How do you think Robert Coles's way of observing people over a long period of time can help you understand their lives and how they raise their children?
- What are some of the values which the Allens seem to stress? What are

some of the ways they encourage these values?

- How much do these values seem to match some of the messages the Allens encounter beyond their front door?

coles's method and your work with children

Look back through all your journal entries and all the materials you have collected from your field work. What things do you understand better as a result of the time you have spent at your fieldsite? Try writing a little about what you have learned.



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