The Elementary School as Modernizer: A Brazilian Study*

DONALD B. HOLSINGER

The University of Chicago, Chicago, U.S.A.

Does the impact of the Brazilian school on the personality of the child develop traits conducive to innovativeness, analytical reasoning, and self-reliance? Are these traits important for the stimulation and acceptance of modernizing social change? The answer to both of these questions must be begged, and instead the tentative hypothesis advanced that Brazilian schools, especially at the primary level where their impact on personality development is greatest, tend to stifle rather than develop the personality traits on which modernization depends, and from which the society must draw its innovators.

John V. D. Saunders, 1969

Introduction

The basic hypothesis of this study is that schools, because of their peculiar learning environment, provide pupils with certain experiences largely unavailable in other social settings, and that these experiences represent conditions conducive to the acquisition of modern values. The line of reasoning used to assess the validity of this hypothesis is as follows: If schools do in fact modernize as predicted, then children who have such school experience should

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display significantly greater modernity than similar children who have not had these experiences. In like fashion, it is expected that the longer a child is exposed to the modernizing influence of the schools, the higher should be his modernity score. This paper presents data which bear directly on the question of a "school difference" and which will provide new and contradictory evidence bearing on Saund's (1969) hunch that Brazilian primary schools stifle rather than develop modern personality traits.

Most studies of individual modernization have had much more than the dependent variable in common. In the main their authors conceive of them as socialization researches—investigations of an aspect of human personality transformation, particularly the processes whereby men and women, adults, have come to their present attitude and value positions. The studies assume a continuum defined at one extreme by those attitudes and values and sometimes, but not frequently, behaviors, which constitute a "traditional" personality state and at the other extreme by a "modern" state. Having delineated the components of the continuum they next attempt to estimate the degree of movement of some human group along the continuum. Movement from traditionalism to modernity is called modernization. Modernity (Smith and Inkeles, 1966) or modernism (Kahl, 1968) is understood in these studies as an end product: the person as he is after he has been socialized to a given point on the continuum. There are, in these terms, more than a single end-product or modernity state for any individual over the course of his lifetime. Modernity then is seen as a set of attitudes, values and related ways of acting occasioned by participation in the institutions of modern, industrial society. Some researchers have attempted to explain the causes of such movement, usually in terms of linear regression models. And while almost all speculate on the probable consequences of individual modernization, very few students of the subject are in a position to address the topic from a position based on scientific evidence.

If there has been a common thread in most modernization studies, outside the persistent question of operationalizing the concept itself, it has probably been their emphasis on the adult or late socialization as opposed to the pre-adult or early socialization of modernity. This focus may result in part from a belief that late socialization processes, such as occupational experience, for example, are in a pragmatic sense a more efficient mode of modernizing human personalities than are the socializing influences common to childhood and adolescence. It is, of course, also much easier to use adults as the units of analysis in our common survey methodologies especially when considering the difficult problem of instrument reliability in studies on children. Furthermore, it is argued that adults, unlike children, are in a position to interact meaningfully with their environment, to experience in an immediate and impressionable way the fruits of value modernization. Inkeles and Smith (1974), in their forthcoming volume reporting the results of by far the most elaborate and sophisticated study on this topic to date, offer the following rationale for their focus on adults:

Our research was motivated, in part, by the belief that significant change in rather basic