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## A CHILD'S EYE VIEW OF WORK

Bernard Goldstein and Jack Oldham

"IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY THE IDEA OF CHILDHOOD DID NOT EXIST . . . AS SOON AS THE child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny, or his cradle rocker, he belonged to adult society."<sup>1</sup> In sharp contrast to this description provided by cultural historian Philippe Aries, ours is a very child-oriented society. Childhood is not only a socially distinct age, but one which in the more recent phases of the Industrial Age has clearly been prolonged. The movement for the establishment of child labor laws, for example, signalled the onset of an era in which children have increasingly been regarded as objects to be protected from the harsher aspects of reality.

Insofar as these "harsher" aspects may be presumed to include the social institution of work, we face an interesting sociological problem. On the one hand, educators and public officials have expressed willingness to entrust more of the responsibility for the child's work-related socialization experiences to the school. On the other hand there is little agreement on such issues as when to begin imparting such information, how much may be taken for granted, or the existence of benchmarks in terms of children's readiness to assimilate certain types of information. A society such as our own, which is highly work-oriented yet protective of its offspring insofar as their exposure to work is concerned, inevitably finds it necessary on occasion to monitor the effects of such countervailing tendencies upon its children. Our task in this chapter will be to survey what the children in our sample know about work and a variety of related phenomena.

Work is sufficiently pervasive as to be taken for granted by children. In the words of one seven-year-old: "Work is work. You'd better drop dead if you don't understand what work is." But as numerous studies by political scientists have shown, the fact that children take their knowledge for granted does not necessarily mean their views are accurate or even settled. Our interests here therefore include the recording and interpretation of children's misconceptions as well as the charting of their learning curves with regard to work. The focus in this chapter will be almost exclusively upon matters of cognition. The goal is to establish the existence of "baselines" of information from which children start, as well as any "plateaus" they may reach during childhood.

This paper is a revised version of Bernard Goldstein and Jack Oldham, *Children and Work: A Study of Socialization*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1979, pp. 33-34, 49-63, 81-84.

Our discussion of cognitive development will be restricted here to knowledge of selected work-related phenomena.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Before proceeding to our findings, it is necessary to say something about the children who answered our questions, and the questions that were asked. This being an exploratory study, the primary research goals were descriptive. The ideal strategy for a developmental study is to follow the subjects over time. Not having the luxury of conducting the ideal study, a cross-sectional design was employed. In keeping with procedures followed in other studies of childhood socialization, pupils in grades one, three, five and seven were sampled at the same point in time.

Respondents attended schools in five communities in north-central New Jersey. The cooperating schools had in common that they were suburban or semirural in location and overwhelmingly white in enrollment. Thus, the sample was comprised largely of white suburban or semirural residents ranging in socioeconomic background from working class to upper-middle class. Generalizations must be limited accordingly, but the findings are thought to be representative of the largely white, public, primary-school population of the state.

While no town is completely homogeneous in socioeconomic composition, the communities from which the pupils in this study were selected can be characterized as working-, middle-, and upper-middle class, respectively. Two are venerable towns whose white frame homes and congenial business districts attest to the prosperity of times gone by. Both are classified for census purposes as "rural centers" but their inhabitants today typically earn their livings as nonfarm industrial, retail, or clerical workers or as shopkeepers. Two other localities are burgeoning middle-class bedroom communities whose occupants are a mixed lot of upwardly-mobile workers: skilled craftsmen and foremen, teachers and lower echelon bureaucrats, and a minority of junior executives and young professionals for whom these towns are "first stops" rather than long-term homes. The fifth area is also a newer bedroom community populated not by "old wealth" but by upwardly-mobile business and professional people, many of whom presumably regard themselves as "having arrived."

Altogether, 905 children were surveyed during the period 1973-75, with boys constituting 55 percent of the sample. Children were surveyed an average of four to seven times during the course of the school site visits. As a general rule, first- and third-grade children either responded in groups to pictorial or simple verbal stimuli or were interviewed individually. Fifth and seventh graders ordinarily responded to questionnaires or other verbal tasks.

It was necessary to develop a series of research instruments of varying formats appropriate for children of different age groups. Following numerous leads in the literature, and after considerable experimentation with in-

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struments of our own design, a battery of ten instruments (some of which had multiple versions) was finally adapted. These ranged in format from straightforward questionnaires about the world of work or parental work roles, to inquiries from a hypothetical "Man from Mars" seeking explanations of everyday work-related phenomena, to picture-stimuli and drawing exercises, to tasks involving the sorting of occupations into categories, to the ranking of occupational value statements.

With the questions of how responses were elicited from the children, and what kind of children were surveyed, out of the way, we can now proceed to the issue of the findings.

### CHILDREN'S KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIFIC WORK-RELATED PHENOMENA

[In this paper, we will focus on] children's knowledge of five phenomena related to the world of work: (1) the process of getting a job; (2) their perceptions of pay differentials; (3) knowledge of occupational authority figures; (4) insight into labor disputes; and (5) understanding of welfare payments. Each will be considered in turn.

**GETTING A JOB:** As anyone with the slightest experience in counseling college seniors can attest, it is often surprising how little prospective graduates know of the finer points of the "job hunting" process. Yet our findings suggest that even young children are aware of the *general* procedures involved in obtaining work. Perhaps we should let our younger respondents speak for themselves in testimony that this is so. The following are representative of the answers given by first and third graders to the question "How do people get jobs?"<sup>2</sup>:

When someone quits, someone else replaces him. You find out about it by looking on the sign outside the place . . . The boss decides if you're good enough.

Ellen, age 6

A counselor tells them what job they have to do . . . You look for one [a job] in the city. You ask someone and they tell you if you can have it.

Sharon, age 6

You go to an office and you pick out the job you want. You ask the boss. And you tell him how old you are, and fill out papers to show how smart you are. A computer does it. The boss decides when he looks at your papers.

Jeremy, age 8

You graduate and then look for a "help wanted" sign, and ask at the place.

Tommy, age 8

You decide in college. You study it. They let you be it if you take a test.

Rita, age 9

They look in the papers. And then drive around and see the "job needed" signs. And they go in, and if they want, they take it. The manager looks to see if you do a good job, and if you do, he hires you.

Keith, age 8

These responses are simplistic in that hiring decisions are rarely so automatic or clearcut as depicted, but they could hardly be called inaccurate. Most first and third graders were able to furnish some level of correct information regarding job hunting. This usually involved an explanation that one learns of the opening by seeing an advertisement in a newspaper or on a sign, then presents oneself in application. Many also elaborated on the criteria involved in the decision to hire. A small minority asserted that such decisions depended primarily on "if they like you or not." More often, pupils recognized that achieved factors play a role, citing needs for education or the passing of tests, or a trial of sorts staged so that the person hiring might decide "if you're good enough." Fifth graders seemed to take much of this for granted, with a slightly greater number (41 percent) answering instead in terms of the fit between one's interests, knowledge, skills, and/or training and the position sought. Among seventh graders,<sup>3</sup> the latter sort of response emerged as the dominant one (47 percent), with a re-emphasis, too, on "other" answers, including recognition of the roles of employment agencies and the like.

There is a clear age-related trend in which answers stressing getting in contact with the hiring source fade in favor of responses which stress introspection and evaluation of the goodness of fit between the job and one's interests, capacities, and qualifications. The general pattern of these results is very much in keeping with that described by Ginzberg et al.<sup>4</sup> in their important study of occupational choice. That is to say, there is definite developmental progress in the direction of increasing "realism," as Ginzberg would call it. But there are also some differences worthy of note. When younger children are asked how one gets a job, their answers are hardly fantasy-based, as Ginzberg presumed their occupational choices to be at ages six to eleven. Rather, they furnish reasonably accurate and objective, if incomplete, accounts of the process of job-hunting. That fifth and seventh graders apparently interpret the question somewhat differently is in itself significant, for it suggests a basic cognitive shift which likely means that many have entered the so-called "tentative period." At this stage they are prone, for the first time, to weigh potential job satisfactions versus that which the individual brings to the job. The older children in our sample were less concerned with how one finds a job than with how one finds *the* job he or she is suited for.

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**PAY DIFFERENTIALS:** Children at all grade levels tested recognize that most people derive their incomes through work. When we broached the subject of pay with children we found nearly universal recognition of the existence of wage and salary differentials. When asked whether all workers received the same pay, 83 percent of first graders, 95 percent of third graders and 96 percent of fifth graders answered in the negative. Many could give no reasons for the inequities they presumed to exist but, among those who could,

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there could be found an obvious trend with age in the direction of realism. As Table 1 shows, the older children in the sample are increasingly likely to ascribe pay differentials to the nature of the job rather than to such individual factors as personal diligence or time spent on the job.

. . . [S]uch explanations as "some work harder" and "some work longer hours" are important to children's work schemes, but give signs of crumbling by fifth grade.

It is of interest, too, to examine children's answers in relation to their socioeconomic status. Working-class children are more likely, at all grades tested, to ascribe pay differentials to individual diligence or the number of hours worked. Among working-class children who furnished reasons for the existence of pay differentials, 83 percent attributed these to the above two reasons, compared to 58 percent of the middle-class children who provided reasons. Whether this may be taken as an indicant of greater realism on the part of middle-class pupils is another question, however. One cannot rule out that these children are extrapolating on the basis of different types of experiences. For example, it may be that children of white-collar workers hear little of the concept of "overtime," while working-class children may quite reasonably equate same with increased pay, and generalize accordingly.

**THE BOSS:** That young children idealize political authority has often been interpreted as the basis of subsequent attachment to the political system.<sup>5</sup> But it has also been demonstrated that positive [feelings toward] political authority fades from third through ninth grade, a fact which casts doubt on the notion that early feelings are simply transferred.<sup>6</sup> The question has not been resolved. Here, our concern is with a parallel question, namely that of children's conceptions of occupational authority figures, i.e. "bosses." Although as it turned out cognition and evaluation are difficult to separate, our primary concern for the present lies with the former. Therefore, we began our inquiry by asking children merely, "What is a boss?"

**Table 1. Percentages, Among Children Giving Reasons, of Explanations for Pay Differentials by Grade in School**

<i>Why isn't everyone's pay the same?</i>	GRADE IN SCHOOL		
	<i>1st</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>5th</i>
Pay varies with occupation	19.7% (24)	28.4% (50)	49.1% (85)
Some work more hours	28.7 (35)	14.8 (26)	8.1 (14)
Some work harder	51.6 (63)	56.8 (100)	42.8 (74)
Total	100.0% (122)	100.0% (176)	100.0% (173)

While there were a great many variations in the responses, three conceptual themes figured most prominently in the answers of children in grades one, three, and five. (The responses of seventh graders were somewhat different and will therefore be discussed separately, below.) The dominant first response, which was offered by about two or three children below grade seven, stressed the "instrumental" [or *task-oriented*] role of the boss. Most children conceived of the boss primarily as an instrumental leader whose role involves telling others what to do and how to do it, or controlling employees' use of time. A small minority identified the boss as an *owner* of the work organization. And a handful formulated their answers in terms of the status or *prestige* associated with the role, noting for example that, "He's the most important person," or "He gets paid the most." There were also numerous "other" responses, for the most part entirely reasonable, but few of which recurred with any regularity among children's first answers to this question.

Table 2 portrays the relative distribution of these responses, as well as the "Don't know" answers among children in grades one, three, and five. While the age differences are less apparent here, it is clear that children are familiar with the concept of occupational authority. Only 9.5 percent of first graders and negligible proportions of older children cannot offer an explanation. But there are slight variations with age in the relative distributions of children giving each of the principal answers. After the first grade, not only do the "Don't know" responses disappear, the "Other" responses also drop off in favor of the more prominent ones. By third grade, one child in six identifies the boss as an owner; by fifth grade a few (9 percent) answer in terms of [prestige] differentials which distinguish such authority figures.

**Table 2. Distribution of First Responses to the Question "What is a Boss?" by Grade in School**

Response:	GRADE IN SCHOOL		
	1st	3rd	5th
Don't know	9.5% (18)	1.0% (2)	0.5% (1)
Instrumental leader	58.5 (111)	69.0 (138)	62.4 (123)
Person with prestige	0.5 (1)	1.5 (3)	9.1 (18)
Owner	6.8 (13)	16.5 (33)	13.7 (27)
All other responses	24.7 (47)	12.0 (24)	14.2 (28)
Total	100.0% (190)	100.0% (200)	99.9% (197)

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With age, we see at least the beginnings of a shift from conceptualization of the boss as a social role to an economic one.<sup>7</sup>

This general pattern changed very little when sex, socioeconomic status, and community of residence were taken into account. Boys were in general slightly more apt to provide a [prestige]-related definition than girls (14 percent to 11 percent), but this remained a minority response at all grade levels for both sex groups.

While first responses may be assumed to be most salient in children's thinking, most furnished more than one answer here. When additional responses were taken into account, it was clear that while instrumental conceptions continue to dominate children's definitions, others emerge or disappear with age. Older children, in addition to being more likely to speak of status or ownership, also begin to mention the *responsibility* which falls upon the boss, as did 22.5 percent of third graders, and 20 percent of fifth graders. That a few first graders attend to [emotional] aspects in defining the boss is also clear: 5 percent noted that the boss is one who helps people, while 12 percent defined the role as that of someone who scolded a lot or was disliked or feared. Older children did not employ such referents. The *control* exercised by the boss over the fate of workers also emerged in additional responses, with 12 percent of children mentioning the boss' significance in hiring and firing. There were no age differences in this last matter.

Among seventh graders, who were asked essentially the same question but in a different format,<sup>8</sup> it was obvious that the burdensome responsibilities of the position were more salient. In fact, this category, which had not even been among the prominent first responses of younger children, rose to second place behind instrumental responses here, with 26 percent of all the responses. We also asked what it is like *to be* a boss. The [most common] answer (35 percent) among seventh graders who responded stressed the difficulty of the role, calling it "hard work" or "a lot of trouble."

What then can be concluded from our analysis of children's conceptualizations of occupational authority? In order to answer this, our findings must be considered in relation to those of previous studies. Danziger had explored the concept of the boss in children five to eight years of age;<sup>9</sup> Haire and Morrison had done the same with respondents in grades seven through eleven.<sup>10</sup> The former had found even the youngest children sampled quite conversant with the term, as we have. We are also able to corroborate the general pattern discerned by Danziger of a shift from answers in terms of purely social functions of the boss to those describing economic functions. In our sample, however, this transition was far from complete, as even among seventh graders instrumental role activities dominated children's social definitions. The economic role of the boss as owner and source of wages and the [prestige] and higher salary associated with the role were, to be sure, more prominent among the older children, but not dominant themes. Nor did we find the pronounced differences b[etween social classes] which had characterized the Haire and Morrison study of children in grades seven

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and up. We did, however, note slight . . . differences in this regard, with middle-class children somewhat more given to the instrumental, responsibility, and status themes, while working-class children were slightly more inclined to view the boss as the source of wages and the one who hires and fires. It would seem that the [social class] differences found by Haire and Morrison come to prominence [sometime after seventh grade].

**LABOR DISPUTES:** The final two work-related phenomena to be considered present us with a departure from the pattern of gradual but steady cognitive development we have seen thus far. For it is only when we examine children's knowledge of labor disputes and welfare that we find, for the first time, a suggestion of the existence of "threshold effects" in children's work orientations. That is to say, here we encounter evidence which suggests a clear age-related demarcation: a certain age prior to which very few children grasp the concept, but beyond which it is understood by most.

It is crystal clear that for the majority of children sampled, recognition of the nature of labor disputes comes between third and fifth grade. As Table 3 shows, there is a forty percentage-point leap in the correct response rates at that point. This suggests either a dramatic increase in "readiness" to grasp this notion of labor disputes by grade five or some unexplained increase in older children's experiential exposure to the term and consequent understanding of it.

During the elementary years, children progress from virtually no knowledge of strikes in first grade to the opposite extreme, at which nearly all seventh graders can render a reasonable account of the concept. The youngest children were unable to account for the depicted hypothetical situation of men with signs picketing a factory to keep others from entering. About three in five drew blanks. The bulk of the remainder resorted to a variety of explanations, especially that of a disaster of some sort—a fire, an explosion, theft, a leak, a fuel shortage, or even the death of a child within the building—which prevented the plant from operating. Some grasped that such actions as were depicted are often taken in protest, citing noise levels or pollution or attributes of the personal behavior of the boss as the reasons for

**Table 3. Children's Recognition of Strikes by Grade in School**

Response:	GRADE IN SCHOOL			
	1st	3rd	5th	7th
Don't know	59.2% (100)	42.6% (80)	6.0% (13)	0.0% (0)
Misconceptions	31.9 (54)	18.6 (35)	15.2 (33)	4.5 (6)
Identified labor dispute	8.9 (15)	38.8 (73)	78.8 (171)	95.5 (127)
Total	100.0% (169)	100.0% (188)	100.0% (217)	100.0% (133)

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same. Fewer than one in ten first graders, however, answered that the men were striking, i.e., that they were refusing to work due to a disagreement with management over wages or conditions. When asked if they had heard the term "strike," over 90 percent indicated they had not, at least not in its present context.

By third grade the term had passed into the recognition vocabularies of a distinct minority of children. The frequency of misconceptions decreased and some children could indeed answer on an informed basis. Nine-year-old Jonathan, while somewhat atypical, is a case in point. He understood picketing as an effort to make management an offer it could not refuse:

It's a strike. [Why?] They wanted something—more money, a raise, a better place—and the boss wouldn't give it to them. And they wanted it. And they didn't want anyone to get into their place. So the boss could go out of business, or give it to them.

Such an answer was relatively rare among third graders. It was, however, typical among the responses of fifth graders, 70 percent of whom supplied the terms "strike" or "picketing" in their accounts of the depicted situations. Haire and Morrison, who had also explored knowledge of strikes [but] in grades seven through eleven, had noted that seventh and eighth graders tended to personalize labor disputes, "to see issues and rights and wrongs as residing in the persons of the protagonists."<sup>11</sup> In light of the present findings, such an appraisal seems relativistic indeed. We have no doubt that, in comparison with the responses of high school students, the views of seventh and eighth graders did in fact seem simplistic due to personalization. But if one examines conceptualizations of labor disputes on an age continuum starting with first graders, the responses of fifth and seventh graders stand out as relatively abstract. Younger children who had understood that a labor dispute was at issue often attributed it to the anger or recalcitrance of one or both parties. Among older children in our sample, such accounts often centered on the leverage which a work stoppage was intended to exert upon management. There was most definitely an observable age-related trend during the elementary years in the direction of increasingly abstract and sophisticated understanding of labor disputes. Moreover, that age was the most significant variable was attested to by our findings of no significant relationship between conceptions of strikes and the variables of sex, [social class,] and community of residence.

When children were asked to evaluate whether most strikes are right or wrong, two further observations were [made] possible. First, with age children tend to gather enough information to formulate opinions on the matter. Only ten first graders both perceived the situation as a strike and expressed opinions regarding its propriety. The proportion of children at each grade level satisfying both conditions rose steadily thereafter, with the third-to-fifth-grade difference, predictably, shifting the plurality to those with opinions. Second, among children who had such opinions there was a

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**Table 4. Distribution of Expressed Opinions Regarding Whether Strikes are Right or Wrong by Grade in School**

Opinion expressed:	GRADE IN SCHOOL <sup>12</sup>		
	3rd	5th	7th
Strikes are right	41.3% (31)	48.4% (74)	50.4% (61)
Strikes are wrong	34.7 (26)	23.5 (36)	22.3 (27)
Conditional answers	24.0 (18)	28.1 (43)	27.3 (33)
Total	100.0% (75)	100.0% (153)	100.0% (121)

tendency, as Table 4 shows, to consider strikes right. This did not shift significantly with age. It is of interest to note also that a substantial minority of children in grades three, five, and seven indicated conditional answers, saying "it depends," or "they're right if . . ." or "they're wrong if . . ." [I]n most of these cases, the conditions specified were monetary, i.e., depending upon whether or not wage levels were fair, or the employer's ability to pay.

Haire and Morrison had earlier noted pronounced SES difference in students' evaluations of strikes. They had found that by seventh grade response patterns were already well established: Middle-class youngsters overwhelmingly thought strikes wrong, while working-class youth felt them to be, if not right, at least necessary.<sup>13</sup> Here, we found much more modest differences. At grades three and five, [middle-class] children were more likely than others to have formulated their opinions in conditional terms rather than to have expressed unequivocal opposition to strikes.<sup>14</sup> In fact, strikes were viewed as at least potentially acceptable by the majority of children of both [social-class] groups at all grade levels tested. Surprisingly, no significant differences by [class] were found in the response patterns of seventh graders. Whether the dissimilarities between our findings and those of Haire and Morrison can be accounted for by differences in the composition of the samples, or the sixteen-year time lag, or some other factors cannot be estimated here. It is, however, certain that the opinions of these children were far less organized along predictable ideological lines, by [social-class], than were those of the somewhat older group examined by Haire and Morrison.

While no significant sex difference had emerged in the opinions of third and fifth graders regarding the propriety of strikes, this was a factor in the responses of seventh graders. Boys were significantly more disposed toward viewing strikes as right whereas girls were more tentative, expressing their opinions more frequently in conditional terms.<sup>15</sup>

**WELFARE PAYMENTS:** Our final effort to explore children's knowledge of work-related phenomena involved the issue of welfare payments. Again, we

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found very few first graders conversant with the concept. "My father tells me everything," said seven-year-old Gene, "but I've never heard of that one!" Over 90 percent of first graders shared his lack of knowledge. By third grade the distribution had changed little, although there were a smattering of "correct" responses.<sup>16</sup> As Table 5 shows, however, the previous findings of a quantum leap in awareness of strikes from third to fifth grade [were repeated] here with regard to knowledge of welfare. But such knowledge was in general neither as extensive nor as widespread as had been awareness of labor disputes. Among fifth graders, for example, about half could furnish a correct response; among seventh graders, about two-thirds could do so.<sup>17</sup>

It is of interest to note that while the proportion of "Don't know" responses decreased with age, largely in favor of correct information, the proportion of misconceptions also rose steadily. Our interpretation is that this pattern attests to the existence of incremental increases in awareness or, if you will, progressive stages of understanding quite possibly indicative of growing readiness to grasp the concept. A few examples will clarify this. First graders either admit to no recognition of the term, or merely surmise from the context of the question that it has to do with money. Only a very few could specify for whom the money was intended or the rationale for the practice. Among some third graders, welfare was often equated with charity or even with the practice of extending credit. Nine-year-old William identified welfare as: "When people come over and help you when you're poor. They do things for you, like get rid of the rats. [Who does?] The rich people." Eight-year-old Jerry said, "When you're poor, you get money. And after you get a job, you pay them back. [Where does the money come from?] The taxes people pay." Thus, some third graders grasped at least the gist of the matter, even if their conceptions may have been muddled or simplistic.

Many fifth graders evidenced a more complex understanding of the matter. Not only had the "Don't know" responses dropped off greatly, but pupils were typically able to name categories of persons believed eligible as welfare recipients. It was also obvious that many confused welfare with

Table 5. Responses to Question "What is Welfare?" by Grade in School

Response:	GRADE IN SCHOOL			
	1st	3rd	5th	7th
Don't know	91.9% (159)	73.8% (144)	20.6% (41)	4.9% (5)
"Correct" responses	5.8 (10)	15.9 (31)	51.8 (103)	65.6 (67)
Misconceptions	2.3 (4)	10.3 (20)	27.6 (55)	29.4 (30)
Total	100.0% (173)	100.0% (195)	100.0% (199)	99.9% (102)

other programs of social insurance, especially unemployment insurance, social security payments to the retired or disabled, death benefits paid to surviving families either by the government or by private firms, even union strike benefits. The common denominator, that welfare represents financial help for those facing hard times, was relatively well understood, although the details may have been confused. Seventh graders were the most likely to supply such information. In fact, most of them (65 percent) furnished multiple responses regarding imputed categories of eligible welfare recipients including: the poor, the disabled, children in fatherless homes, large families with inadequate means of support, the elderly, the sick, those temporarily out of work, and, finally, those too lazy to work. While many of these answers are technically incorrect, they nonetheless suggest the growth of social awareness of the world of work.

We found no differences in children's knowledge of welfare by sex or community of residence. One would, however, expect differences in such awareness by [social class], if only because middle-class families may be presumed to have less first-hand contact with welfare and are [possibly] less outspoken on the issue within the home. This was found not to be the case, however, until grade seven, at which time [working-class] children display somewhat greater awareness of the concept than did middle-class children.<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the [social-class] split in this sample is between middle-class and working-class children, often from the same communities. There are few children from "poverty areas" represented, and to our knowledge only a handful of children from families receiving welfare. That first-hand experience with welfare is an important contributor to knowledge of the concept is eloquently attested to by the following interview with Kevin, a nine-year-old from one of the rural communities:

I: Do you know what welfare is, Kevin?

R: My dad's on welfare. And when we go to school, you get tickets and get free lunches. And sometimes, when you don't have a mother, the welfare . . . [He pauses, losing train of thought.]

I: [Changing the subject] Does everyone get welfare?

R: No, because some people don't like welfare. [He then stresses that his father appreciates it, and that he does not know why others look down upon it.]

I: Do you know why some people get it?

R: No, but my dad gets it and other people do, too.

I: Where does it come from?

R: It's from "The Welfare." Your dad pays half and the Welfare pays half—for the babysitter. So when you need a babysitter [He means day-care service] you don't have to spend all that money. The Welfare pays half.

This last point, illustrative of children's vague allusions to the source of welfare payments, points up another aspect of their general pattern of

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awareness of the phenomena. Only one first grader could correctly identify the government as the source of such payments. Among third graders who had attempted an explanation, only 29 percent had "correctly" identified the source, citing either the government, the state, the city, or tax revenues in their answers. By fifth grade, this figure had risen to 51 percent of those attempting an explanation; by seventh grade it was 90 percent. The range of misconceptions in this regard was greatest among fifth graders, one of whom, for example, explained that those who could afford to do so purchased policies from Mutual of Omaha, which subsequently made welfare payments if they were needed.

As had been the case with children's opinions regarding strikes, older children proved not only better informed concerning the nature of welfare, but more inclined to evaluate it as well. Children were asked their opinions on whether they were "for" or "against" welfare. Admittedly, since we have already established that children perceived welfare as a benefit to the unfortunate, this was a loaded question. The "pro" responses far outweighed the "cons." But the former diminished somewhat with age in favor, not of negative answers, but conditional responses.

In order to ascertain children's opinions regarding welfare, we posited a hypothetical situation in which two men argued its "pros" and "cons." We then asked children which person they thought was right. Among young children, support of the welfare program tends to be unequivocal, largely because the perceived stakes were so high. "If they don't get enough money," said eight-year-old Jimmy of welfare recipients, "they could die." For ten-year-old Sandra, who claimed several of her neighbors are on welfare, the threat is very real. "The one for welfare [was right]," she said, "because they need to take care of them, so they don't die." For Stanley, age six, the logic of the practice was evident: "Some people don't got enough money to buy things, like food . . . some people would die if they didn't have welfare, 'cause they wouldn't have enough money to buy food." For others, like eleven-year-old Bryan, there is a moral imperative involved: "[the one] for it [was right], because he wants to help people who aren't as well off as themselves." Still others think of the social consequences of doing away with the program. "If there weren't welfare," observed a fifth grade girl, "people would be outside roaming the streets."

The older children, however, tended to qualify their evaluations. "If everyone got it, the world would be a big mess," noted ten-year old Andrea, who nonetheless supported the concept, ". . . because if there was no welfare, we would have beggars, and people living in the middle of the street." Most supported the practice, but "only for the people that need it—that don't have a job and they're poor," to borrow the words of ten-year-old Diane. "If you're not very sick or very hurt," offered a male classmate, then as far as he was concerned, "you don't get it!"

Very few shared the opinion of ten-year-old Eddie, who described welfare as "getting money free," and said he opposed it on grounds that, "People

have to work for their money." Such pejorative views of welfare recipients, presumably common among adults, were *not* found to any significant degree among the children sampled.

In conclusion, lest anyone remain tempted to dismiss all elementary children as ill-informed or incapable of understanding the matters discussed in these pages, we offer the thoughts of a remarkably well informed fifth-grade girl:

I: Do you know what welfare is, Laura?

R: Welfare is money given out to people that don't have jobs and can't get jobs.

I: Where does it come from?

R: The government.

I: Which person do you think was right, the one for welfare or the one against it?

R: I think the one for it, because without welfare how would these people be able to live? They wouldn't be able to buy food. The only other thing they could get would be unemployment, and they would need a job for a little while for that.

## SUMMARY

Alexander Pope, in his *Essay on Man*, long ago declared that "The child is father to the man." The task of determining at what point the child "gives birth," as it were, to a socialized "product" has largely been left to social scientists. In this chapter we have been concerned in particular with the child's cognitive development with respect to work. We have explored a number of issues under that umbrella question. Do we have a pattern to point to for our efforts? The answer would seem to be a qualified yes. The pattern of age-related growth in awareness of work-related phenomena has been apparent throughout our findings thus far. While we have noted, on the one hand, examples of surprisingly high awareness from very early ages and, on the other, a few instances of genuine "threshold effects," it is nonetheless possible to point to a general pattern of steady cognitive growth throughout the elementary years, with the greatest changes usually coming around grade five.

Such a general observation requires considerable qualification. In the first place, it should be acknowledged that variations by specific items were in some cases quite large. And, there were instances in which other [background factors], particularly sex and socioeconomic status, influenced the results. On the other hand, there were very few cases of no cognitive growth to report despite the great many variables examined here. Moreover, that the pattern is indeed developmental or age-related is attested to by the consistency with which changes in cognition were found to be signifi-

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cantly, and often strongly, related to grade in school, without regard to any existing relationships with other variables. The latter, in any event, were surprisingly few.

## NOTES

1. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 128.

2. Throughout this report all respondents' names, indeed all proper nouns have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the pupils involved and their families. Also, in some cases, probe questions were inserted by the interviewer in order to get children to elaborate on matters under discussion. For purposes of clarity and simplicity probe questions are omitted wherever this practice does no damage to the substance of the child's answer.

3. Seventh graders answered the same question in writing as did fifth graders, but on the Knowledge of Work Questionnaire, Part II.

4. Eli Ginzberg et al., *Occupational Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951).

5. The child's idealization of political authority figures prominently in several studies of political socialization. For a review of this literature, see: Fred I. Greenstein, *Children and Politics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 31-54. See also: Fred I. Greenstein, "The Benevolent Leader: Children's Images of Political Authority," *American Political Science Review* 14 (December 1960), pp. 934-943. For consideration of how such imagery is thought to translate into attachment to a political system, see: Robert D. Hess and Judith V. Torney, *The Development of Political Attitudes*, especially chapters 2 and 3.

6. Edward S. Greenberg, "Orientations of Black and White Children to Political Authority Figures," *Social Science Quarterly* 51 (December 1970), pp. 561-571.

7. Danziger, in his 1958 study of Australian schoolchildren, had noted a similar shift from the purely social to the economic in children's conceptualizations of the role of the boss. He, however, was able to discern this shift by age eight, the oldest level at which he tested. Here the shift comes somewhat later. See Kurt Danziger, "Children's Earliest Concepts."

8. Children in grades one, three, and five were asked to explain the term "boss" to a hypothetical alien. Seventh graders were asked to explain what was involved in being a boss.

9. Kurt Danziger, "Children's Earliest Concepts."

10. Mason Haire and Florence Morrison, "School Children's Perceptions of Labor and Management," *Journal of Social Psychology* 44 (November 1957), pp. 179-197.

11. Mason Haire and Florence Morrison, "School Children's Perceptions," p. 189.

12. First graders are not included in Table 4 since only ten both recognized the strike situation as a labor dispute and had formulated opinions on the matter.

13. Mason Haire and Florence Morrison, "School Children's Perceptions."

14. Specifically, the actual responses of the third and fifth graders were distributed as follows. Thirty percent of respondents from middle-class families as compared to 50 percent of respondents from working-class families thought strikes are right; 28 percent of both groups thought strikes were wrong; and 39 percent of the former and 22 percent of the latter gave conditional responses.

15. Among seventh graders, 58 percent of the boys said strikes were right, compared to 35 percent of the girls. On the other hand, 37 percent of seventh grade girls answered conditionally, versus only 18 percent [of] boys.

16. Here the standard applied in classifying children's responses as correct was rather liberal indeed. Any child who identified welfare as money for the poor or for those *unable* to work, and/or as a situation in which the government pays for the living expenses of the poor, was considered to have at least a functional understanding of the concept.

17. Children in grades one, three, and five were asked to explain the concept of welfare to the alien, who had supposedly overheard two men arguing over whether the practice was right or wrong. Fifth graders answered in writing. Younger children were interviewed. Seventh graders were asked to define welfare in writing, and to evaluate it.

18. Among seventh graders 51 percent of those from middle-class backgrounds correctly identified welfare, compared to 71 percent of those of working-class backgrounds.

## Review Questions

1. With respect to which of the following concepts are children socialized *gradually*, or incrementally? Which of the concepts seem to be grasped more *suddenly* at a given stage of intellectual development?

- a. how one gets a job
- b. why pay differentials exist
- c. the role of the boss
- d. the meaning of worker strikes
- e. the meaning of social welfare

2. To what extent were the first graders studied by Goldstein and Oldham aware of the world of work? The older children?

3. What differences were found between working-class and middle-class children with regard to perceptions about work? What factors might account for these differences?

4. What differences were found between girls and boys with regard to perceptions about work? What factors might account for these differences?

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