



This paper is taken from

*Future Citizens in Europe  
Proceedings of the fourth Conference of the  
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe  
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2002

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 356 5

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
  - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
  - a official of the European Commission
  - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

*Fumat, Y. (2002) Can primary socialisation be democratic? in Ross, A. (ed) Future Citizens in Europe.  
London: CiCe, pp 291 - 295*

© CiCe 2002

CiCe  
Institute for Policy Studies in Education  
London Metropolitan University  
166 – 220 Holloway Road  
London N7 8DB  
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- Cass Mitchell-Riddle, head of the CiCe Coordination Unit
- The University of North London (now part of the London Metropolitan University) for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of the European Commission Department of Education and Culture for their support and encouragement.

## Can primary socialisation be democratic?

*Yveline Fumat*

*Professor Emeritus, Université Paul Valéry Montpellier III (France)*

Note: in French '*l'enfant*' (the child) refers to both the female and male child. Here we have used 'he' to refer both to the girl and boy.

From birth, cultural creations hold individuals in a network of physical marks (e.g. piercing) and signs which directly mould their bodies (tattoos, clothes which either straighten up or constrain), shape their postures (ways of holding, or walking), guide their movements through structured spaces and objects, familiarise them with the prevailing aesthetic modes and give them their first experiences of perception. The transmission of cultural creations is first and foremost a story without words which owes nothing to discourse, to injunction or to prohibition. It is achieved without programming, it has no project and follows no principle; it is carried out without even the interference of an adult, but simply because we are born and grow up in a culture where each object bears meaning, each gesture is symbolic, each relationship is codified. When a child first opens his eyes, he sees his tribe's aesthetic forms, he hears the songs and sounds of his language; when taking his first steps, he walks in a 'cultural landscape' which owes everything to his elders. The early years of socialisation correspond to the anonymous and ubiquitous process which Bourdieu defines in opposition to more elaborated forms of cultural transmission:

For as long as the pedagogical activities are not clearly institutionalised as both a specific and autonomous practice, and a whole group and cultural environment symbolically structured exercises, without either specialised agents or specific moments, an anonymous and diffuse pedagogical action, the main part of the 'modus operandi' which defines the mastering of practice is transmitted through practice, in a practical way, without accessing the level of discourse. (Bourdieu)

It is possible to identify three forms of transmission on a continuous line going from the most spontaneous to the most thoughtful, from the least conscious to the most conscious: these are socialisation, education, and pedagogy (by refining Bourdieu's opposition);

- through the socialisation process, a whole group, by their very mode of living and being, 'shapes' the young ones and integrates them into their culture;
- through education, adults, conscious of their role in socialising want to transmit their values and their knowledge to the young ones;
- through pedagogy, adults - and very often educational experts - set up environments, devices or specific strategies to reach this goal.

Among the various socialisation processes which mould the child and communicate the group's way of life, one can isolate those who teach him 'how to live together'. Within this more restricted meaning, to be socialised does not mean to learn 'all you need to know to live in a culture' but rather more specifically 'how to live with others'.

This second and more limited meaning of the concept of socialisation focuses our attention on the social tie, the 'being social'. Amongst all the things that the young ones must learn, they must, first and foremost, learn the rules of the 'social game'.

In our societies, it is very much the family which teaches the infant 'the rules of the 'social game' and lays down the basis of the primary socialisation which we want to examine here.

### **Socialisation through the family**

From birth, the child is integrated into his group's power struggle through his family (gender and class relations, relationships between different ethnic groups) and through his position within the family, his place among his brothers and sisters, his gender. From a very early age, he is guided to a set of very special arrangements. A biased perception of the social struggle, but also a well defined ability to act in relation to the position he will have to hold, is going to be set out.

How does the child access the social roles according to the division of the modes of transmission presented above? Is it an impersonal and subconscious shaping? Is it a voluntary and conscious education? Or is it a pedagogy which truly discloses its ends and means?

All these levels exist and occasionally co-exist and that is why it is important to locate more systematically the primary level, the level before language, an original basis which remains completely unspoken and which is therefore all the more meaningful. Social roles as well as language and aesthetic forms are perceived not in their cultural specificity and their arbitrary nature but rather as an immutable natural fact. The power to act for each member of the family, the extent to which each person can act, the allocation of tasks, appear to the child like 'something which is already there' and for which nothing occurs to deny its ineluctable process. Gender roles, for example, are not even given as a model to emulate because they go so much without saying. Social relations, as well as other cultural forms, are part of a 'landscape' where nothing suggests their relativity. Primary socialisation is achieved by means of registering passive habits which can be acquired through frequency, regularity, everyday routine and felt impressions.

It is true that this first level of socialisation always comes with actual educational practices which also explain, reinforce and give meaning to social ties. An injunction underlies all the recommendations and advice given to a child: 'take your place, hold your rank, do what you have to do'. The parents' discourse signifies through each micro-speech, that he must become what he has to be. All the restrictions, but also all the praise, whether explicit or implicit, 'insinuated' (Bourdieu) contribute to determine his capacity to act, his value and ultimately his social identity. Each appeal to surpass oneself, each warning, each formal demand continuously outlines and defines, little by little, an 'action zone' where the child will be able to play his role.

By discouraging aspirations towards unattainable objectives, by letting the child explore, and try other avenues, the family creates for the child the range of choices which will become his.

### **Towards a democratic socialisation within the family**

We must now clarify the basic forms of social relations already acquired within the family before any socialisation by other institutions comes into play, so as to better define in which ways the family can move towards training the child in democratic values.

What kind of role specifications and power imbalances can be put into place within the family? We can isolate three aspects:

- the relationships between children according to their rank
- the gender relationships (between boy and girl)
- the relationships between adult and child.

#### *Age relationships*

The position of the eldest, the first born, has been for a long time and in all societies the guarantee of a certain power recognised by the group, to the extent of giving the eldest prerogatives in the legal succession.

#### *Gender relationships*

The distinction of masculine and feminine roles is established from birth: by valuing the new born differently, especially the first born ('it's a boy!'), through the different attention paid to the baby (even today, some groups may favour the nutrition of a boy if food is in short supply), through the different tolerance vis-à-vis movement in general (a greater dynamism is better accepted from a boy, because it is seen as a sign of future masculinity, whereas it is discouraged very early on in the girl, who is expected to be more graceful and 'sweeter'). Parents do not consider a boy and a girl in the same way, thus forging their gender identity. This is achieved through the way the child is held, the way the child is given a drink, is taught about cleanliness. Each tone of voice, as well as each piece of advice will set up the frontiers of what the child is allowed to do, how s/he can act in a way which is specific for each child but also more limited for the girl; the girls will always be encouraged to demonstrate more wisdom, more calmness and more 'closeness' ('do not play, go too far') thus maintaining them in an 'invisible enclosure' (Bourdieu).

But when there are brothers and sisters, one extra means is put at the disposal of the parents, who are in an ideal position to teach their children the relations of submission between the sexes. The way in which the girl is made to agree, to concede, to step aside for the boy - even if she is the eldest - builds day by day the basis for male domination. Girls will always have to be more reserved (woman's role) more devoted (mother's role). Selfishness and selfish enjoyment will be less tolerated from girls.

#### *The relationship between adult and child*

The distance between adult and child is regulated very early on in the family. It is a fact that small children are less strong, less agile, less knowledgeable than adults. In every society, they are genuinely weaker and more helpless. In fact, societies 'treat' this factual inequality differently; most often they prolong it, but sometimes they also correct it or compensate for it.

The 'unquestionable superiority of adults' takes on many guises: adults' domination of beings naturally weaker than themselves has taken, over the centuries, the most arbitrary forms: daily violence (physical brutality), sexual abuse in the home, exploitation to the limit of the child's strength. Societies have had to safeguard themselves against a domination both so instant and so simple, otherwise they would not have survived.

On all three levels - rank, gender, and adult/child relations - the family starts the work of socialisation which more or less follows the direction of natural inequalities and, above all, of physical force. Over time, families have built a social hierarchy which has gone along with a cruel inequality not far removed from natural forces. New social

relationships are established in families the moment they stop accepting that these inequalities narrowly define the relationships between parents and children, between elder and younger children, between brothers and sisters.

Socialisation in the family becomes more democratic the moment it moves away from the hierarchy dictated by natural inequalities. It is the whole legal and moral evolution of modern societies which relieves the father of this absolute power, erases the 'law of primogeniture', gives equal rights to men and women, and proclaims the rights of children.

If the family remains the site for micro-struggle relations, if the first 'habitus' are impervious to democratic values or even in conflict with the values later proclaimed, how can we hope to build social ties which are truly democratic?

To succeed in promoting equal rights within the family, we must aim towards erasing all power struggles (between the youngest and eldest child, boy and girl, adult and child). Biological differences should no longer be an excuse and opportunity for a different 'social treatment'. The elder/the girl must be considered on an equal footing with the younger/the boy respectively. The distance between adult and child must decrease in such a way that the child, despite his/her weakness, is treated as an equal. What underlies this notion of 'equal rights' is very much a common identity, despite natural differences. What comes first is not age, sex/gender but the fact that one is a 'human person': the principle of equality is very tightly linked to that of freedom and the autonomy of the person. What is therefore respected in the very small child is his freedom, or more precisely his capacity to become a free subject.

## **Conclusion**

The interest in introducing the concept of 'democratic socialisation' before or alongside the 'education for democracy' is very much to draw attention to the much less conscious processes essentially linked to learning 'through the body' which dominate the early years, but which can at a later stage operate mutely and therefore deny a fixed democratic attitude or a masking discourse. Thus we will be able to understand the contradictions which remain between the stated principles and the power relations between teacher and pupil, or between the aim of forming an opinion and pedagogical forms which rely on submission or even, in secondary schools, the ever-present distortion between representation on 'boards' (legal power given to the pupils) and the way in which they are allowed to speak up (which go through all kinds of non-verbal condescending expressions). The way of introducing the child in an early dialogue, of giving him a human face, of considering him - but also the nature of the power relations (ways of making the child obey, demanding submission or respect from him, explanations, negotiations), the style accompanying the action (praising or crushing the individual initiative, play on sharing or competing, helping or diminishing their self-confidence) - all give primary socialisation its more-or-less democratic characteristic and build 'habitus' in agreement or disagreement with subsequently proclaimed ideals.

(Translation: Christine Hochleitner)

## References

Bourdieu, Pierre (1974) *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* Droz Genève

Bourdieu, Pierre (1997) *Méditations pacaliennes* Ed. Minuit Paris

Bourdieu, Pierre (1998) *La domination masculine* Paris Seuil

Elias, Norbert (1969) *La civilisation des mœurs* Pluriel

Fumat, Yveline 'Vers une socialisation démocratique' *les Cahiers du CERFEE* N° 15  
Université Paul Valéry Montpellier

Fumat, Yveline 'La socialisation des Filles au XIX° siècle' *Revue française de Pédagogie*  
N° 52 Paris

Mauss, Marcel (1976) 'Sociologie et Anthropologie' *Les techniques du corps* PUF Paris

Mead, Margaret (1975) *L'Un et l'Autre sexe (les choses du corps)* Denoël Gonthier