His First Goat

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The Chore Curriculum

His First Goat - Ladakh

“As late as the nineteenth century, the majority of children in the West were encouraged to begin supporting themselves at an early stage. The age of 7 was an informal turning point when the offspring of peasants and craftsmen were generally expected to start helping their parents with the little tasks around the home, the farm or workshop.” (p. 37)


The simplest and earliest task for which children are given actual responsibility is the running of errands, transporting objects to or from people's homes or going to a local shop for a few cents' worth of goods. Considerably more difficult are the errands to the maize fields or other errands that require the child to go outside the community. Selling various items in the community may range in complexity from approximately the status of an errand to the cognitively complex task of soliciting buyers from anywhere in the community and of making change. Children may engage in the caretaking of a younger sibling. (p. 276)

Village in E. Central Sudan

“In a typical morning or afternoon a youngster selling water made at least one trip for his or her own family and returned to the well four to eight more times to fill a pair of five gallon jerry-cans and hawk them in the village. Each pair sold for the equivalent of about twelve cents, and children generally contributed their earnings to their households…Ten-year-old Sami, the middle child of three and the oldest boy in his household, went in search of firewood almost daily. … Sami’s father was not a tenant and earned an extremely modest living primarily from the sale of charcoal he produced.” (p. 14)


“When children are from five to six years old they are delegated their first chores of importance in the daily activities of the household. They are by now regarded as old enough to be significant contributors, able to assist in a variety of different tasks. The assignments are, however, always adjusted to their physical age and mental maturity, as interpreted by their parents. The children are still not regarded as capable of heavy work such as most agricultural labor, netfishing, and other activities that require physical strength.” (Broch 1990:79)
“Many different goods are bartered in Miang Tuu. Most of these items are natural products, such as fish, turtle eggs, fruit, and mildly fermented cassava \((tape)\)… Mothers engage their sons and daughters between the age of seven and twelve years to barter the goods. … Boys and girls carry what they have to sell on small trays placed on their heads. While they walk around the village, they cry out the name of the product and its price. Those who want to buy call on the young traders. The wife in a household that lacks children of the right age summons her neighbor’s son or daughter to do the selling.” (Broch 1990:84)


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they cry out the name of the product and its price. Those who want to buy call on the young traders. The wife in a household that lacks children of the right age summons her neighbor’s son or daughter to do the selling.” (Broch 1990:84)

The following is a wonderful example from Mexico of a young girl learning to market. I would note her youth and, also, the considerable length of time in which she can learn these skills.

Paradise, Ruth and Rogoff, Barbara In press. Side by side: Learning by observing and pitching in. *Ethos*

This eagerness appears in the involvement of a four- or five-year-old Mazahua girl who learns as she spends hours, days, and weeks seated beside her mother or other women emulating and helping at an onion stand in the marketplace in México (Paradise 1985). She trims onions. She tirelessly practices tying them into bunches with or without success. She arranges them carefully on a piece of plastic laid out on the ground, fanning away insects patiently during long stretches while seated on the ground beside the onions. She ties pieces of plastic above them to keep them from the direct sunlight. When, eventually, in the form of an abandoned piece of cardboard, an opportunity to put together her own small stand presents itself, her excitement is unmistakable and she quickly takes the initiative in finding an appropriate spot and setting it up. (p. 18)

“The men may also allocate plots to their sons and speak of the growing yams as their own harvest.” (Hogbin 1969: 39)

“At the age of ten the boy makes an occasional fishing excursion in a canoe. To start with, he sits in the center of the canoe and watches, perhaps baiting the hooks and removing the catch, but soon he takes part with the rest. In less than a year he is a useful crew member and expert in steering and generally handling of the craft. At the same time, I have never seen youths under the age of sixteen out at sea by themselves. Often they are eager to go before this, but the elders are unwilling to give permission lest they endanger themselves or the canoe. Most fathers have allocated at least one pig to the son by the time he is about eight; moreover, they insist that he accept full obligation to gather and husk coconuts each day so that the animal can be fed in the evening. Usually the child is at first keenly interested, but after a time he may have to be scolded severely to make him attend to his duty.” (Hogbin 1969: 39)
All Work and No Play?


“Saddiq and Mohamed let the animals graze, joining two friends who had met them along the way to play *shedduck*, a game in which players hop holding one leg behind them, madly attempting to knock down their opponents while remaining standing.” (p. 6)


“Separating work from play is often problematic.” (Broch 1990:83)
Productivity and Proficiency


Incompetent hunter scares seals off from breathing holes.

“Boys at the age of ten begin to be taken along on hunts, not to hunt themselves, but to participate by handling the dogs while the adult male crept slowly up on a seal, if it were spring hunting, or stood stoically by the breathing hole in winter, waiting for the sound of an animal…Young Inuit males worked to the point where they would finally be allowed to make the kill.” (p. 74)

“As mentioned earlier, in the traditional Inuit family young children were given a degree of personal freedom which would probably shock even the most permissive southern parent. In the case of boys, it may well have been intentional on the part of the parents, for they were aware that they were socializing children who would become hunters in one of the most demanding and often dangerous environments on the face of the earth. Young girls were also given almost unlimited freedom.” (p. 76)

“Miang Tuu children are eager to help their parents in various ways. Both girls and boys beg their father for permission to come along on fishing expeditions. Children also wish to participate in agricultural work and the gathering activities on the beach. One day permission is granted, but the next day a similar request is refused...Children’s help is often a burden that prevents the adults from doing effective work.” (Broch 1990:83)

“Children often reduce the output of their parent’s fishing activities. When the children are excited and eager to help, they soon forget that they have to be careful and watch their movements to avoid frightening the fish away.” (Broch 1990:85)

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Grater boards have a special place in community, history, and socio-political relations in the northwest Amazon for several reasons. First, the Baniwa are the sole producers of graters in a vast area that encompasses numerous Native American language groups. Second, the graters are a necessary item in the daily preparation of food. Third, the grater boards move through the region via exchange networks that follow marriage alliances.

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“All males must learn to carve and design the boards since no specialized artisans perform the role for others. Boys must learn the craft of grater-board making from their fathers and must be ready to complete a board when they marry, because making the board is the first act of marriage…The act of teaching is itself a religious act, one that connects the son to his father, to the patriline, to the ancestor, and to the place in which creator Iñapelikuli is depicted in stone. Moreover, it embodies that boy’s preparation for marriage, since it is in that context that he will make a board and offer it to his wife. The learning process reproduces and transits several types of knowledge: historic and
cosmological information contained in the elements of style; the domination of the father over the information.” (p. 145)


Children began to learn practical skills through games and also through imitating their elders. There seems to have been a great deal of individual variation in the amount of instruction given. Thus one woman recalled, “I go with my mother all the time. She showed me how to weave baskets… I do one row; she does the next; I do the next. That’s why I learn so quick.” … Another woman, however, said, “As the only girl, I had to learn to do all kinds of things. My mother didn't want to teach me, but I watched and learned." This was the child who took her mother’s *ulo* without permission and cut her finger, because she was so anxious to learn how to slice seal fat. Another recalled how eager she was to learn how to cut fish for smoking and how she nearly wept over those she spoiled. (1965:14)

**Note another example of parents repulsing children who would treat them as teachers.**


During the time [Marie, a Navajo girl] spent at home she hovered as persistently as a goat about her mother's loom, sitting as near her
mother as possible when she was weaving, now before the loom
now behind it when her mother was away from it…ungraciously
repulsed, Marie was, if possible, more fascinated by the looms and
their equipment"  (p. 38)

"[Marie] filched small quantities of the undyed yarn she herself
spun, giving her white and grey. Red and black she stole from her
mother as she did her warp…carried the loom about...each time
she brought the sheep home...she had to carry it with her...for it
was not likely her mother would order her to herd in the same
direction twice in succession"  (Reichard 1934: 41)

**Marie becomes an expert weaver, working largely on her own.
She “graciously” teaches the author how to weave.**

“Marie sits by my side watching carefully lest I make a mistake.
We don't talk much, except about the points of weaving... Besides,
Marie does not "tell" when teaching. She "shows." The Navaho
word for "teach" means "show." (Reichard 1934:21).”
Apprenticeship


“Ulpian provides this discussion: If a master wounds or kills a slave while training him, would he be liable under the *lex Aquilia* for criminal injury?...A shoemaker has a pupil who is a freeborn boy, under his father’s authority (‘*ingenuo filio familias*’), who is not following instructions satisfactorily, and he strikes at his neck with a shoe-last, knocking out the boy’s eye. So Iulianus says that there is no valid action for injury because the shoe-maker struck the boy not with the purpose of causing him injury, but with the purpose of reminding and teaching him.” (p. 194)


“When looking at these studies—once again, mine included—one gets the feeling that parent-to-offspring accounts of transmission could be partially fictional, a research artifact due perhaps to an over-reliance on interviews during fieldwork, some preconceptions about craft learning in informal contexts, and the emphasis put by the artisans themselves on “tradition” and “heritage,” especially when confronted by foreigners.” (p. 153)
“When asked about the identity of pottery producers in southwestern Niger, most individuals answer that “pottery is the work of Bella women”…” (p. 156)

**Learn from kin…**

“In southwestern Niger, as in most other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, learning is not a particularly visible process. One is seldom confronted with situations where knowledge is explicitly transmitted from a teacher to an apprentice. When asked about the origin of their skill, however, most potters explain that they learned it from a single person, in a particular place, and at a particular time…This “single person” is reported to be the biological mother in about one-half of the cases.” (p. 158)

“The majority of the potters interviewed learned the craft at the age of six to twelve, in the village where they were born or raised.” (Gosselain 2008: 158)

“Some interesting elements must be highlighted about this participatory story. First, most people do not view it as actual learning, even though it provides them with most of their skill. They simple “give help,” without aiming to acquire or master specific knowledge. Second, the tasks are usually undertaken communally…Third, there is no particular order in what apprentices learn, and no necessary coincidence with the actual ordering of pottery chaîne opératoire.” (p. 160)

“People consider to be the actual learning phase: mastering the shaping technique. Up to then, the apprentice assists in several operations and has a playful relationship with shaping but does not
really try to make vessels. If the apprentice is sufficiently “motivated” and “gifted” (two notions that crop up constantly [Gosselain 2008: 160] in interviews), the teacher redirects the game toward the acquisition of expertise and adopts a more active role with her pupil. There is clearly a shift in status at this stage, which some Bella, Songhay, and Zarma teachers signify by giving the apprentice a miniature model of a terra-cotta pestle used for pounding clay. To help the apprentice overcome her difficulties, the teacher now works alongside the apprentice, correcting her errors and movements and, quite often, holding the apprentice’s hands so that the later can physically sense the correct movements and hand positions.” (p. 161)


“Among the thirty-six potters who were interviewed, only four were apprentices. A significant diminution of the number of apprentice has been observed over the past twenty years. Indeed, pottery is losing its exclusivity for utilitarian vessels, and according to potters’ statements, not enough income is being made for it to be worth maintaining. Consequently, most Dii girls born into the potter “caste” do not grow up to become potters.” (p. 187)

“[Historically, to]…have an ungifted apprentice or potter in the family is a disgrace, and every potter is required to reach a certain
level of expertise in order not to depart from the rest of the potter families.” (p. 187)

“Among the Dii, apprenticeship starts during childhood, around the age of seven, and lasts between five and eight years, with an average of four hours of training per day during the dry season and two hours per day during the rest of the year. The length of apprenticeship corresponds to the physical, psychological, and social maturation of the child. As long as apprentices work with their mothers, they will not benefit from any sales they make. The mothers will collect all income and return it to their husbands, who are the official redistributors of wealth. This practice prevents an apprentice from ever becoming a technical or economic (p. 187) competitor to her mother, who holds the sole pottery-making authority within the household.” (p. 188)

“Stage One lasts two years. The young girl, usually a seven-year-old, helps by fetching clay, water, or wood. According to mothers’ statements, during this period the child is learning the value of work and building the motivation necessary to assume such physically tiring activity…No formal instruction during this stage. She instead learns through observation and is allowed to play with pieces of clay only to sense the texture of the raw material.” (p. 188)

“The child is discouraged from asking any questions, and verbal communication does not serve as an incentive to learning. State Two begins around age nine and lasts for approximately one year. The apprentice is now discharged from some domestic duties to focus on pottery making. She is asked to shape miniature models
with no decoration. Some are fired and sold or given to family, friends, or other children, while others are just thrown away before firing. Here again, the mother does not welcome questions. The child usually sits next to her (p. 188) mother and watches her work. The mother does not seem to pay any attention to what the apprentice is doing as long as she seems to work on her projects. The mother will intervene only to redirect the attention of the child and make comments like “Pay attention to what you do,” “don’t be so lazy,” “Don’t waste the clay,” “Watch what I do.” So, what is really involved here is a reconstructive observation-imitation process as the child makes miniatures by interpreting the method used by her mother to make full-sized pots. The process illustrates the ability of the child to integrate the shaping pattern and to adapt it on another scale to her own work. It also implies the use of a trial-and-error technique, because the child has to figure out by herself how to interpret the model correctly.” (p. 190)

“Stage Three begins at age ten, when apprentices shape small cooking pots rather than miniatures, usually with little decoration. They make partial rather than full designs...The apprentice still works from clay kneaded by her mother, who declares that it prevents wasting precious material...Initiative and trial and error are now forbidden; every gesture must follow the mother’s patter. Corporal punishments (spanking, forced eating of clay) are used to ensure that rules are respected, and verbal humiliations (p. 190) are very common. Mothers interpret mistakes in technical form as proof of social disorder and defects in morality, and as a challenge to their authority. Good behavior is rarely noticed, but errors are always pointed out in pubic. This treatment puts a lot of pressure
on the apprentices, who tend to be quite nervous when working in their mothers’ company.” (p. 191)

“We asked each apprentice to shape a series of five rather standard, plain cooking pots, and we recorded the time needed to do so. When the apprentices did this task alone, they managed to handle it in about the same time as their mothers, but when they were asked to perform the same task in front of their mothers and a few other potters from the same village, the time necessarily for the shaping drastically increased.” (p. 191)

“Motivation built on social comparison would be associated with closed abilities and a strict reproduction of patterns, while that built on mastery goals would tend to produce more individualistic practices and a greater openness to innovation. To get a clearer view of the mother’s impact on her apprentice’s work, we asked apprentices to shape a bottle, a model they had not yet learned to make. All apprentices refused to attempt this task, because they were not sure they could succeed. They seemed to refuse new challenges they had not been trained for.” (p. 191)

“Stage Four begins on average when the apprentice reaches age fourteen. During the following year, she makes a greater variety of models, she works form clay she prepares herself, she handles the whole shaping process and takes care of the pre- and postfiring treatments on her own, and she learns to shape the collar of a bottle. This stage is considered to be the most difficult to accomplish. The apprentice is now capable of describing every stage of the making process, but she still does not handle the firing by herself. The apprenticeship, at this stage, continues to be
focused primarily on observation and imitation and shows very little use of language as an educative incentive. The mother intervenes only to correct major mistakes.” (p. 191)

“Stage Five takes place when the child reaches age fifteen and lasts for only a few weeks. The apprentice learns to handle a firing on her (p. 191) own, although she may still need the advice and assistance of fellow potters for many years to come. The end of apprenticeship is marked by a celebration that implies that the apprentice is capable of making every type of vessel; she must be engaged to a future husband and must have gone through initiation. All the potters of the village and their families are invited to witness the debut of the new potter. During the ceremony, the apprentice receives a set of tools from her mother and is fed by her like a small child. The father confirms the status of the newborn potter by spitting beer on her face, as he does on the newly circumcised boys or on the ancestors’ altar. This particular moment, when the parents praise the young potter, seems to be the only one that promotes positive feedback. AS some potters say, she learned through pain and difficulties to cherish the value of her tie with elder fellow potters.” (p. 192)


“Research on ceramic technology…among the Asurini do Xingu, an Amazonian indigenous population inhabiting a village in the margins of the Xingu River, Pará, Brazil.
The learning process of pottery making starts early in life, and, in my different visits to the village through the years, I witnessed girls and less skilled young women being trained by the older women. Learning the process of forming the vessel body is one of the hardest stages, and the novice has to produce many vessel miniatures, performing all stages of vessel production, including firing and painting. It is difficult for the young potters to master the stern rules associated with the Asurini forms. It is easy to identify pots made by inexperienced potters—the vessel body is often poorly made or the smoothing of the surface is too rough, the rim is very frequently irregular and the resin was not well applied, leading to small mistakes and rough patches.” (p. 235)

“The teaching–learning structure of knowledge on ceramic production is characterized by observation, by the young potters, of the work done by the more skillful potters. Beginning when the girls are very young, they are given practical instruction in the production of the vessels, which include how to work with all the raw materials and instruments related to this activity. Furthermore, they are encouraged to produce miniatures of the traditional ceramic vessels.” (p. 247)

“From what I could observe, the learning process happens through visualization and manipulation of the material. The miniature seems to be the most common didactic tool, and teaching with miniatures is also used with other crafts, such as making sleeping hammocks. As with other ceramist populations, the teaching of vessel production is extremely controlled, and it requires constant
verbalization and demonstration from the instructors relating to the techniques, as well as on the results to be reached in each one of the productive stages.” (p. 235)

“In addition, it is also necessary for them to know how to select and process the raw material and how to manufacture their own working instruments. One stage of production that requires experience, for example, is the moistening of the clay to make it workable. If the clay gets too moist, the coils will stick in their hands, production will be much more difficult and irregularities will be found in the vessel’s form.” (p. 235)

“In conclusion, the ceramic learning process is long and complex, and, for this reason, it is mostly the older women who master this knowledge. Child rearing gets in the way of the learning process, therefore women are taught the craft very early, before they become mothers. Skill in this activity is reached only with the passing of years, and it is usually the older women, around 50 years of age or more, who are considered the best potters in the village.” (p. 236)

“These technological rules, however, do not prevent the women from exercising their individual creativity when producing their vessels. All of them said that they could recognize their own vessels from those of the other potters. According to them, the recognizable traces are found on the rims, base and body. This recognition relies on very subtle categories that, many times, are difficult for the potters to verbalize. I could never identify these differences, and even the potters themselves often found it difficult. This is the reason why it is common for them to carefully
store their vessels separately, inside their houses or attached structures, so that they would not get mixed up with vessels made by other women of the same domestic group.” (p. 238)

As has been observed in other ethnographic contexts, the more control the instructor has over the novice during the process of learning and creation of a material item, the more similar the objects they produce will look (Pryor and Carr 1995: p. 280; Roe 1995: p. 51). Thus, among the Asurini, where there is a high level of control in the ceramic learning process, one can in fact observe similarity not only in the objects but also in the procedures used to produce them. The teaching and learning process is so tightly controlled that the Asurini pots are unmistakably different from those of other cultural groups.” (p. 247)


“Nowadays, the Asurini women have abandoned the traditional usage of most of the ceramic vessels previously used to serve food and store and transport liquids. These have been replaced by several types of industrialized objects such as aluminum pans,
plastic jars, plates, cups, bowls and Thermos bottles. Thus, their production has become restricted to vessels to sell to tourists outside the village.” (p. 241)


“None of the women weavers of nomadic-style tribal rugs and flat weaves used locally has young apprentices; their skills and products are considered old-fashioned.” (p. 4)

**In the book, I note how many anthropologists fairly quickly acquire proficiency in native crafts after a short apprenticeship. Here is the other side of the coin:**


“…the New Guinea native who asks the European to “teach” him to make paper or glass. The European has great difficulty in explaining that although he uses paper and glass—although he in fact claims possession of the higher technological culture in which people know how to make paper or glass—he himself is totally unable to carry out and so to teach the process.” (Mead 1964: 51)
Becoming a Navigator

This marvelous book is still in print!

“Indian Hindu children are also considered gifts from God…The fusion between mother and infant is central and starts, according to the Vedas, during the prenatal period where the fetus is considered to be *chetan*—conscious of having a soul…The mutual relationship is strengthened by *matri-rina*, or indebtedness toward the mother. This implies a lifelong relationship with the mother that includes the duties to protect and nurture the mother.” (p. 110)


“…that children, in eating food that parents have grown and given them, literally sap the parents of their strength. When Aminguh talks of aging fast after having children, he is speaking in literal terms.” (p. 193)
Little Buckaroos
Poverty and Children’s Labor

Fish Sellers – Hodeidah


1. Excellent survey of Brazilian social and economic history which has seen economic transformations that marginalize landless, uneducated workers. And the poor are stigmatized.
2. Poor are made scapegoats for all sorts of social problems. Good general introduction to poverty as a way of life.

“In Brazil, over six million children between the ages of 10-17 and 296,000 children between 5 and 9 are working….Children produce much of what Brazilians eat, wear, and sleep in…The cacao, gems, minerals, soybean, and grape industries have all required the use of cheap (children’s) labor.” (p. 2)…800,000 children who harvest crops with their families in the United States [in 2005].” (p. 3)

“Life histories show that parents started working at the same age as their children. According to Bete, age 41, and mother of seven, “When I was eight years old I was already working in other people’s kitchens, just as my mother had done before me. Now, my kids are growing up with the same routine, working to help me“…The market for maids is saturated…If your employer dismisses you, they can always get someone else.” (p. 31)

“Malnutrition also stunts children’s growth. I was always shocked when what I thought were 10-year-olds turned out to be 15-year-olds.” (p. 30)

Economic activity…

“Approximately 45,000 children work in lixões (garbage dumps) in Brazil. In Olinda, the dump is located in Aguazinha, a few kilometers from the city center. The city produces approximately 700 tons of trash per day. In 1994, about 200 people lived in the lixão and depended on urban residue to survive (the number has since increased to 350) (p. 65)…The children in lixão would talk
about “quando en caí no lixão” literally, “when I fell into the garbage,” to describe their move to the dump. They are ashamed to tell people where they live: “People think we are filth…Kinds hold their noses when we walk by. Kids don’t want to play with us, because they think our toys are from the garbage.” (p. 66)…Children described their work as scavengers as superior to begging: “It is better to pick garbage than to steal or beg. If I steal, I might be arrested. If I begged, I would never know how much I could earn. Any kind of work is better than being a bum.” (p. 67)…Tourists frequently offer food, but the kids prefer money. “I just want money. It’s easier to divide than food. That way I can buy what we want, and still come home with some money. When there’s nothing to eat, my mother sends us out to beg. My father will kill us if we don’t’ go out and bring something home.”” (p. 68)

“Children also age out of particular ways to earn money.” (p. 70)

“Kids were encouraged to find others to feed them, which had the effect of reducing their domestic consumption.” (p. 75)

“Guias (tour guides) range in age from 6 to 26. Girls also work as guias, but males dominate as guides. Work as a tourist guide is a status job, primarily because it does not involve physical labor, there is contact with foreigners, and the income is significantly better than vending or other waged work…Younger guides received no formal training. They learn by listening to other guides, or they make up information as they go along. Many perceive that the gringos (referring to any foreigner) who hire them don’t know if they are providing misinformation.” (p. 75)
“In the last 20 years, school attendance has increased, and child labor has declined in Brazil. The Bolsa Escola (school scholarship) is a conditional cash grant program started in 1996 that gives mothers approximately US$6 per month per child (ages 6-15, up to three children) as long as the children maintain 85 per cent attendance (p. 109)…Some schools provide children with a cesta básica. However a number of parents complain that the baskets contain foodstuffs of extremely poor quality, things they “would not purchase for themselves if they had the money.” Essential items such as toilet paper, sanitary napkins, toothbrushes, and toothpaste are not included.” (p. 110)
Plus ça change

Spinners & Doffers in Mollahan Mills