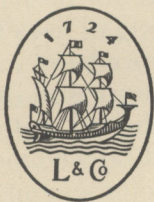


THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TEACHING

BY

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TEACHING

FOREWORD

Close contact and cooperation with experienced teachers in service and prospective teachers in practice has resulted in the conviction that educational psychology the country over is making a very meagre contribution to the work of the average schoolteacher. Especially is this true of the teacher's daily work in the classroom. The consensus among teachers is that the courses they took in college were interesting, but so theoretical and with so little relationship to practical problems that they were of no help. Such a condition may be due to several factors. First, a survey of available texts leaves one with the impression that almost all of them were written for advanced graduates majoring in educational psychology. They are organized logically without regard for teachers' problems, and they assume in the reader a psychological sophistication rarely found even in graduate students. Second, it seems that most courses in educational psychology operate on the assumption that to hear is to be able to do. Applied psychology is a sham unless it leads to the development of functional skills, and functional skills cannot be developed by lecture or discussion. The psychology of teaching must be a laboratory course for the same reason as chemistry, physics, or surgery. Third, although there is a vast and somewhat uncoordinated body of facts in the field of psychology, the teacher actually draws on a fairly small array of psychological facts, but this is not apparent until an effort is made to cut through the maze of theories and schools of thought and pick out the facts upon which good teaching rests. For example, the literature contains endless discussion of the stability of the IQ. Little of this material is functionally useful to a schoolteacher. Furthermore the question of IQ stability is far from settled. The brief discussion of intelligence in Chapter IX is limited to those well-established facts which are most useful to teachers. Several topics, such as heredity and environment,

the laws of learning, and theories of learning have been either omitted or treated briefly for the same reason.

The omission of chapters on growth and development and on the problems of childhood and adolescence implies only that they are ordinarily handled in a course other than the usual educational psychology.

The present volume is short because prospective teachers need to learn a few facts, and do a great deal of work trying to apply those facts to practical problems.

It is hoped that the book is written in such simple terms that any college student can understand it, because one of the greatest faults of texts in general is that they are beyond the understanding of those who should read them. It is further hoped that the discussion leaves few if any fundamental concepts to the previous learning of the student. Experience constantly indicates that such understandings rarely exist in spite of earlier courses.

The use of a trial edition of the book in classes at Cornell University indicates that students should read it slowly because it is fairly concentrated, but that it is not difficult to understand. It is suggested that students be assigned practical problems, which incorporate the ideas in the various sections, rather than additional reading. Such a procedure has been profitable in the early use of the book.

To recognize the source of all the ideas incorporated in this book is literally impossible by virtue of the nature of learning. Nevertheless, the teachings and encouragement of Professor Guy T. Buswell of the University of Chicago have done much to provide the courage to attempt a task as unorthodox and abusive of tradition as this book will be judged by some to be. Professor Buswell is not, however, responsible for the weaknesses of the book, which is far from being an adequate representation of his teachings.

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CHAPTER I

WHAT EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY IS

101. *The nature of the subject.* Human psychology is the study of the behavior of human beings. It deals not only with *how* people behave, but also with *why* they behave as they do. Educational psychology is that branch of general psychology which deals primarily with problems of learning, considered from the standpoint of the characteristics of the learner, the nature of what is to be learned, and the process by which learning takes place. Those who plan to become teachers are ordinarily required to have some training in educational psychology, but state certification requirements are often vague as to what this training is supposed to contain. It is no more possible to cover educational psychology in one course than it is to cover chemistry or English or business administration in one course. Obviously then, any single course in educational psychology must select from the whole field those materials which are of greatest value to teachers. A course so organized is in reality a course in the psychology of teaching, and not a course in the whole of educational psychology.

Along with a common failure to recognize this limitation, a seemingly endless debate has arisen as to whether educational psychology is a science or an art. The answer is simply that, as in all other fields of study, there is a scientific aspect which deals with the discovery and ordering of facts, and there is also an aspect which is essentially artistic or applicatory. In the general field of educational psychology, then, there is a rapidly growing scientific search for facts, the study of which is usually reserved for those who intend to become educational psychologists. There is also an attempt to apply those facts to school problems, and it is within this area that the prospective public schoolteacher should concentrate attention.

The art of effective teaching must necessarily be founded on psychological facts discovered by the scientist. In reality

the psychology of teaching should begin with an attack on an organized body of psychological facts selected for their usefulness to the teacher. To avoid an academic sterility, those facts should promptly be fitted into the daily behavior of a student, and there should follow a gradual transition from the learning of facts to the evolution of sound methods of teaching. The point at which the psychology of learning ends and methods of teaching begin defies description by any other than a purely academic method. This is the same as saying that the psychology of teaching bears no fruit without producing the superstructure of sound procedures for teachers, just as a course in methods is as artificial as a paper flower unless it stems from a sound psychological root. This text is built around the position just stated, and while it does not attempt to cover the field of teaching methods, it does not hesitate to carry useful psychological facts over to a speaking acquaintance with school practice. One might venture to hope that a prospective teacher of any merit, who has obtained a vision of the place of psychology in school practice, could thenceforth solve his teaching problems in a sound manner.

102. *The educative process.* There are three related tasks in every school. First there is the student's task of learning. This is the process of acquiring or making changes in one's knowledge, skills, and preferences. This task is essentially the learner's. It goes on within him and must be carried out by him alone. The teacher is an onlooker, not a coparticipant in this task. Second, there is the task of teaching. This is the art of facilitating desirable learning. It is something which the teacher should do without distracting the learner's attention from his task of learning. It is a behind-the-scenes act whose primary purpose is to set the stage for the learner, but in no way attempt to do his work for him. How it should be done depends on what the learner is trying to do, since its chief purpose is to facilitate desirable learning. Third, there is the task of both pupil and teacher of making a satisfactory adjustment to the school situation so that their joint presence in school is a source of satisfaction rather than one of annoyance. These three tasks define the scope of this book, and

are the most important phases of educational psychology for the prospective teacher.

103. *What the teacher must know.* These seven general areas of knowledge are of importance to the teacher: (1) The nature of human behavior. (2) The nature of the learning process in general and its variations with relation to the various types of end-products sought. (3) The relation of the learning process to personal adjustment and maladjustment. (4) Educationally significant similarities and differences among people. (5) Factors in the school situation which influence the learning process. (6) Evaluative techniques by which progress and status may be ascertained. (7) The nature and purpose of counseling.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

201. *Behavior is adjustive.* When Caesar said "Veni, vidi, vici," he was using a formula which, with variations, describes all human behavior. "I came" says he met a situation. "I saw" says he examined the situation and found its meaning and its possibilities. "I conquered" announces his satisfactory mastery of the situation. Everyone is continually "coming" to situations. Almost every human act is performed as a reaction to some situation. One meets a situation when he glances out of the window and sees rain falling. His response may be no more than a grunt. One meets a situation when he is ordered by a bandit to throw up his hands. The possible kinds of situations are limitless.

All people are not equally able to "see" clearly what their situations involve, nor are all situations equally understandable. Similarly all people are not equally able to "conquer" their situations, nor are all situations equally conquerable. This chapter deals with some of the variables that are responsible for such differences.

All human behavior can be subsumed under one of the two headings, learning and adjusting. They are essentially the same process, the only difference between the two being found in the presence and nature of the barrier which prevents immediate resolution of the situation. Therefore, it is possible to make a psychological analysis of behavior in general which is equally applicable to all instances of behavior whatever the circumstances under which they arise.

202. *Three factors in behavior.* There are three basic elements which go into the making of all purposive behavior. They are (1) a strong *drive to action* which some have called a *drive to self-realization* or a *self-seeking tendency*, (2) a *pattern of meaning and values* which the individual possesses as an outgrowth of his total experience, and (3) *the situation*

which calls forth the act. Every student of human behavior needs a clear understanding of each of these three factors.

203. *Drive to self-realization.* A number of terms have been used to indicate this drive, such as the will to survive, a yearning for better things, love of life, the search for the good life, and seeking the kingdom of heaven. All of them have one common characteristic — they indicate that the person is trying to bring about or maintain that state of affairs he believes most likely to give him a satisfactory existence.

The drive seems to be derived from the basic needs of the individual. It is fundamentally dynamic in nature, being greatly concerned with the necessity of acting, but depending on the directive factors in behavior (the pattern of meaning and values) for its direction. The drive to self-realization and the pattern of meaning and values are the two principal aspects of motivation, which is discussed in Chapter III.

It must be understood that self-realization is not only concerned with the achievement of certain large goals, such as the basic values or ideals of the person, but finds its expression in all the behavior of the person from the most highly localized act to the most highly generalized or culminative act or series of acts. Self-realization is won by varying degrees. It has its momentary and temporary aspects as well as its extended and continuous aspects. For example, the act of eating is a way of achieving self-realization of a sort. It needs frequent repetition. The action involved in earning a month's pay is a way of achieving self-realization on a somewhat larger scale and over a longer period of time. Activities leading to a diploma or degree are acts of self-realization on a still larger and longer scale. Any act which has as its purpose the winning in some degree of a major value such as social prestige, personal improvement, wealth, religious security, and others, is an act of self-realization.

It is also true that self-realization involves escaping the destructive forces around the individual. Any act which has as its purpose arriving at the lesser of two evils in any dilemma is an act of self-realization. So are acts which seek escape from unpleasant circumstances, thwarting of undesirable trends,

overcoming of enemies, or relief from intolerable conditions of living. Self-realization is not to be confused with selfishness, or with the idea that pleasure is the dominant goal of people. Selfishness involves seeking one's own welfare at the expense of others, whereas self-realization may and usually does include the well-being of many others around the individual. For example, the notion that heaven is a state of existence marked by great friendliness implies that self-realization requires the well-being of many others than the one concerned to make such a condition possible.

It is probably true that one never deliberately acts in a manner which is contrary to his own self-realization. To understand this fact, it is necessary to realize that each individual's interpretation of what it means to realize himself most fully is firmly based on what life has meant to him up to that point. In other words, the good life is not an absolute quality viewed alike by all. It varies with the individual. What is considered to be the good life by one may be entirely repugnant to another. Each person seeks to realize that condition of living which seems good to him.

Another fact of great importance is that each person tries to employ those techniques and ways of acting that have proved their value to him in the past. This means there are few if any modes of acting which are universally regarded as profitable, reliable, good, ethical, or what not. Society tends to give approval to certain ways of acting because the experience of the masses, by and large, indicates that certain ways of acting are better for all concerned than others. This does not imply that each individual will agree with society. On the contrary, many individuals have discovered in their own limited experiences that so-called antisocial techniques are of much more value and reliability to them than some approved techniques. This may be explained in two ways. First, the individual may have had a consistently atypical sort of experience in which he obtained what he wanted by his unsocial techniques without being caught and penalized by society. As far as he knows, then, his techniques are good. Second, there are many ways in which social ideals are at variance with ac-

tual social practice, as in the case of American competitive business life, which to some extent ignores the democratic ideal of cooperation and mutual regard. In the instance of the uncaught and unpenalized individual, life has led to the belief that his methods are good. When society becomes aware of them and begins to object to his conduct, he resists the objection because his point of view disagrees with the social point of view. He thinks he is right. Hence his actions are in harmony with his self-seeking tendency, even though they seem to others to be more self-destructive than self-seeking. Similarly, in the instance of behavior which is socially accepted but contrary to certain ideals, the individual's competitive practices may result in the destruction of the very condition he wants to promote. His experience has not taught him so, however, and he has no course but that which he has learned through experience. He may later realize that he destroyed what he was trying to build, but he will say with much truth that he thought he was acting wisely at the time. The same self-seeking tendency which caused him to act viciously when he believed that such action was profitable, will cause him to act with gentleness and consideration when he comes to believe that his own well-being depends on that kind of behavior.

204. *The pattern of meaning and values.* Each person has a pattern of meaning and values which controls his choices. The pattern of meaning is the direct result of his experiences throughout life. Each individual is constantly summing up or generalizing from his total experience, either consciously or subconsciously, and arriving at some sort of conclusion as to what life has meant to him up to any given moment. These generalizations may range all the way from a confused muddle to an intelligent and profound understanding of life. From experience the individual acquires many facts, many beliefs and opinions, concepts, impressions, ideas, values, and ideals. These are his background; they determine his point of view on any given question, and represent his understanding of the world and everything in it with which he has had any experience. Whenever he faces a situation which requires the mak-

ing of a decision of any kind, he draws on his pattern of meaning for an explanation of the situation and an answer to what it seems to hold for him in the way of possibilities. A startled person sometimes says "Hello! What's this?" or "Where am I?" The questions illustrate perfectly what is happening in his mental processes. He is appraising the situation as a preliminary to making a choice of behavior.

The most powerful elements in making such a choice are the values of the individual. Values are not to be confused with attitudes. One's values consist of those conditions of life which are deemed by the individual to be essential to his well-being. They are general in their nature. For example, one may place a high or a low evaluation on great wealth, or home life, or excitement, or physical comfort, or security, or any of several other such general conditions. In reality the evaluations are relative, so that it is possible to say of a given person that his highest value may be friendship, one of his lowest or most antagonistic values may be excitement, and he may be relatively neutral about such values as comfort and wealth. Thus the values of which any person is aware tend to rank themselves according to their importance to that individual, ranging from the most attractive, through the neutral area, to the most repugnant. This order represents his value pattern. Some writers call these values general attitudes, or affective values, or master sentiments. Confusion will be avoided, however, by confining the word attitude to the use described in the next paragraph.

Specific attitudes have to do with one's feelings toward specific things in specific situations. The attitude is a phase of behavior (see section 206). It appears at the precise moment the person becomes aware of the meaning of a situation, and shows how he feels things are apt to go for him in that situation in terms of his basic values. A crowd of autograph hunters will evoke a favorable attitude from one who has a high evaluation of fame and prestige, but will evoke an unpleasant attitude from one who prefers comfort and quiet.

The demarkation between values and attitudes is not a constant line. It depends on the means-end relationships in the