

An Introduction
TO THE PSYCHOLOGY OF
THE CLASSROOM

by

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TECHNIQUE"

With a Foreword by

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FOREWORD

The attempt to translate psychology into the language of some group or class of citizens or of citizens in general is comparatively of recent origin. For years it was regarded by many as a mysterious science, closely akin to medicine in that respect. Its language was abstract with a highly metaphysical flavor. Its speculative and introspective conceptions, since the late nineties of the last century, have been superseded by a type of psychology that is objective, highly technical, and statistical in character. To understand the language, to interpret the results, to use the techniques of this new type require special training and ability.

It has been presumed always that psychology has a bearing on life and that, if one could only understand it, he could order his life with greater certainty. It has likewise been presumed, in fact it has been demonstrated time and again, that psychology is social as well as personal, that it applies to and affects the actions of groups as truly as it applies to and affects the actions of individuals.

Perhaps the most significant phenomenon in the whole range of education during the last twenty-five years has been the number of studies, investigations, and scientific researches that have appeared in the field of psychology. These contributions have touched the field at many points; they have illuminated dark corners; and they have exposed for further study many new problems. Numbers of articles, and public discussions with regard to them, cannot increase without a public opinion being formed eventually about them. The

mass effect of thousands of articles dealing with the psychological aspects of individuals, of groups and classes and institutions, has made the public more and more curious to find out just what effects or bearing all this has on life itself. Numerous attempts have been made to write popular treatises for the assistance of employers, salesmen, personnel officers, institutional managers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and the like. Psychologies have been written for the man on the street, for even he is curious about the subject and its relation to him.

Sometimes these attempts at summarizing and interpreting deal with specific details. For example, books that assemble and interpret everything of a scientific character that have been written about spelling, or arithmetic, or reading, are limited in scope and function. And if they undertake to discuss such topics as height of letters in relation to speed in writing and the correlation of these two factors with interpretation, or the order of teaching the multiplication table, or how the perceptive unit in reading varies with the size of the type in reading, they are still further limited in scope and function. Books of this character are intended to modify practice in definite and special ways. They are essentially technical in character and are of use to those working in restricted areas or fields.

On the other hand, books summarizing and interpreting psychological studies often attempt to present the more general implications and applications of the studies. In such instances the authors are thinking not so much in terms of practice as in terms of those larger categories of human thought that constitute the background and give meaning to the modification of practice. While this book is entitled *Introduction to Psychology of the Classroom* and might therefore be presumed

to belong to the first of the classes, it nevertheless belongs to the second. The teacher who comes to it with the hope that he will find out exactly what to do in each of the varying circumstances of his day's work in school will be disappointed. But that teacher who comes to it with the hope that he may find in clear and readable language an interpretation of the contributions of psychology to the life and spirit of the classroom will not be disappointed. The man who studies to change practice thinks in terms of methods and is doing something that is valuable; but the man who studies to know what lies back of and gives meaning to practice thinks in terms of philosophy and is doing something that is still more valuable. Every survey of any field resolves itself in the final analysis into a consideration of fundamentals. This book is distinctly of this later kind. Although on every page and in nearly every paragraph one receives practical information of immediate value, still all these shifts and changes in methods and practices set forth are illustrative of modes of thought of more fundamental importance. Thoroughly modern and forward-looking in its point of view, the book lays a heavy hand upon a great mass of scientific studies and takes from them those facts and deductions that should constitute the common knowledge of every classroom teacher. It is the kind of book which should hearten the teacher who shrinks from the technical language of the typical psychological study; it is the kind of book which should be welcomed by those who sincerely desire to know what relation psychology has to the classroom.

L. D. COFFMAN.

PREFACE

It is probable that every writer reflects many of his early experiences in his books. *An Introduction to the Psychology of the Classroom* is frankly acknowledged to be an outgrowth of the writer's early professional schooling when he was thrown abruptly into a formal textbook in psychology during his normal-school training. The many hours of blind and unsatisfactory labor that were spent on that text made an indelible impression. Although the subject of psychology held much prestige and was studied in many courses, it always seemed to be dealing with generalities that were never satisfying.

As a consequence of the feelings that came from this early training, the writer has for years felt an urge to write an introduction to the field of psychology for the teacher that would be more pertinent to his problems. When the opportunity came it was decided to adopt the point of view of the classroom teacher and to write about those things in the mental make-up of the child that one would find it profitable to know. When considered from this perspective, theories and schools of psychology became insignificant and an understanding of the behavior of the child and the workings of his mind became fundamental.

Many sources of information have been drawn upon in the preparation of this book, some of which are seldom referred to in the orthodox classroom in psychology. Each, however, has contributed some truth or interpretation of a truth that has been helpful to the writer. Since this reading has covered a period of more than twenty years, it is impossible to be certain

of the exact source of many of the ideas. Therefore, it would be an absurdity to credit them to specific writers. The justice of this point of view was forcibly brought to the writer's attention by the re-reading of a long forgotten notebook that he had kept when in normal school. In it were some of the so-called modern ideas that are being exploited by present-day practice.

The points that have been included in this book are those that seem to be most helpful in interpreting the teacher's problems. Where the ideas are only of general interest, they are not introduced. Few definitions are presented in an academic way because technical terms are understood only when they have vital meanings. Formal definitions often are a delusion because they sometimes pass for real knowledge. If they are desired for any purpose, they can be found in the books included among the suggested readings.

This book has been planned so as to provide for the individual differences that may be found in the ordinary normal-school or college classroom where it may be used. The text material can be considered as the minimum which must be mastered to pass the course. It can be supplemented for the brighter students by means of the exercises and the suggested readings. The readings have been limited to a few good books that are likely to be found in the average school library or that can be added to it at a small cost.

Some who read this book may wonder why the suggested readings were chosen from these authors instead of from others whose books are considered to be just as good. The fundamental reason is that the writer has had more opportunity to become acquainted with the ones included or was especially impressed with their value. Other books may replace some of these and the one who teaches this introductory text should be on

the alert to discover any new and better readings that may be used.

The deep obligation of the writer to many authorities in the field of psychology has been implied in a preceding paragraph. He also is indebted to many students of the classes in psychology that he has taught for help in getting a fundamental view of the problems.

Gratitude is expressed here for the permission to quote from their copyrighted books that has been so generously granted by the publishers whose books have been quoted.

I also must acknowledge the help of my wife who has coöperated in many ways in the preparation of the manuscript.

CHARLES ELMER HOLLEY.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CLASSROOM

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The young man—or woman—who turns to the profession of teaching for an occupation usually finds himself busy with problems that are new. As a consequence, he needs to make a thorough preparation if he expects to be successful, for many keen minds have been trained for this work. Further, the standards in our better schools are fairly high now and tend to go higher.

The teacher's fundamental problems grow out of a lack of understanding, in many cases, of the ways in which the child's mental life develops. When he was a student, the teacher made but little use of any knowledge about other people's mental activities. He was concerned most vitally with his own problems which, in the main, consisted in surmounting the hurdles that others put before him. To be sure, he might pick out and set up a few mental hazards of his own, but as a rule his education was made up, in its most important aspects, of the items that others chose and arranged.

In his work as a student he was guided largely by experience and his inherited capacities, for the road is long and he was not expected to show proficiency at the start. Time was given to him in plenty and the best efforts of society were devoted to leading him in

the right paths, for the duties of the individuals in authority are assumed to be largely those of directing the learning and other activities of the coming generation.

When the student turns teacher he steps across the line and takes his place among those who do the leading instead of the following. This change necessitates a new point of view. It requires an appreciation of what the young are going to do under varying situations. It calls for an understanding of the mental make-up of all types of people, many of whom are very different from the student who becomes the teacher.

The untrained individual can bring to the solution of this problem only the limited wisdom that he can recall from his own experiences as a student or that he can pick up from his everyday associates, some of whom may have taught school a little. As a consequence, the problem seems very complicated to the beginning teacher. It is made worse sometimes by the fact that some of the popular theories concerning mental phenomena are erroneous and only befog the situation.

The lack of accurate methods of study that characterized the mental sciences until the close of the nineteenth century can be held partly responsible for these incorrect theories, for it is the tendency of the human mind to speculate about the gaps in its information. In some cases these gaps were filled by plausible explanations that were subtly false, or that were only partly true. Since the knowledge of the masses lags behind that of the leaders of thought, oftentimes as much as a generation or two, many of these half correct hypotheses are still being passed on from one layman to another because they are plausible. They are of little value to the teacher, however, because it is

their generality that makes them true at times though false at others. The teacher needs specific information that is true.

Our accurate knowledge in the field of mental phenomena is all comparatively new. It is the product of the combined efforts of many workers of the last few decades. Therefore, it is being added to at a very rapid rate at the present time. This large mass of new information is being passed on to the masses as rapidly as possible, but even then it takes a decade or more for it to reveal itself at all widely in the practice of the schoolroom.

The mental life of the child has been considered in a number of conventional ways in the past. In general, these same phases will be taken up in this book, but only so far as they are clearly related to the problems of the classroom teacher.

At the start we shall consider the problem of heredity versus environment. Then we shall analyze somewhat the original nature of the human being, thus discovering something of the parts played by individual differences, the instincts and emotions, and learning. Since an understanding of learning is very important for the classroom teacher, considerable space will be given to it. When this topic has been completed, we shall devote a little time to some of the theories, especially to that of formal discipline. After we have considered the question of the measurement of mental abilities, we shall close our survey with the topic of mental abnormalities and their relation to mental hygiene.

A thorough understanding of any phase of psychology seems possible only when the reader has a fair knowledge of the human anatomy involved in the nervous system. Since many students acquire this information in classes in physiology, there will be no attempt to

provide it in this book. If a reader finds that he is unfamiliar with phases of this information that seem necessary, he should supplement the material of this book by a study of the structure of the human nervous system in some book that fits his need. As a rule, chapters from one of the older textbooks in psychology will be found best for this purpose, though a good treatise on human anatomy and physiology may prove to be excellent.