

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATION

*AN INTRODUCTION AND GUIDE TO
ITS STUDY*

by

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To Managers in Business
To Foremen in Factories
To Leaders in Clubs
To Teachers in Schools
To Parents in Homes
To Husbands. To Wives
To Sisters. To Brothers
To All who have Tried to Educate
even on one Day

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE
CONFORMITY WITH THE AUTHORIZED
ECONOMY STANDARDS

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TO THE READER

THE ability to educate is possessed by you. The desire to educate has been experienced by you. In the pages which follow an attempt is made to describe certain of the conditions under which educating is effected and some of the reasons for its incomplete successes. The words "teacher" and "pupil" are employed freely since these conveniently express the relationship between an educator and one whose behaviour he desires to modify. Their use does not imply that the description is relevant only to educative processes as these are carried out in schools. The problems involved are the same whether their solution is attempted in workshops, in factories, in homes, in schools, in camps or in clubs.

The subject is an important one. Upon the manner in which educating is carried out, and upon the interpretation of human nature on which it is based, depend the issues of ultimate war or peace, of neurotic distresses or mental health, of tyranny or co-operative living in homes, in schools and in workshops—as well as in the larger communities of states or continents.

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PART I

TEACHERS AND THE PUPILS THEY TEACH

CHAPTER I

THE CLASS LOOKS AT THE TEACHER: AN ASSESSMENT OF PERSONALITY

"THERE'S the new teacher. We had him this morning."

"What's he like?"

"Not bad."

"I couldn't hear what he said."

"He looked decent."

"He laughed a lot."

"He didn't see the paper dart I was making."

"He talked too much."

"I'm glad we're to have him."

"Anything's better than the last one."

"Oh, no. He's not so good. I'm not going to work for him."

"He can't write on the blackboard."

"He can't mark a register."

"Perhaps he's a student—not a teacher!"

And so the talk went on as the boys and girls walked out of school. The same sort of talk might have been heard later that same evening when older girls and boys went home from the club and students returned from college. A new teacher is an object of supreme interest to any community of young people; but adults do not always notice the extent of the attentive scrutiny they receive, and rarely do they realise the degree to which youngsters are judges of character and engaged upon the diagnosis of personality.

What means do pupils employ to discover whether the new member of the school group is to be accepted, admired and followed, or rejected, despised and persecuted (in so far as persecution may prove worth while)?

The first method they use is observation of externals—physical characteristics, dress, manner and speech. Pupils prefer teachers to be of their own type—to fall within the limits of the normal as they know it. What those limits are will depend upon their past experiences—their home life and social back-

ground. There are no absolute standards. A certain accent may prove a handicap in one district and a social asset in another. Certain mannerisms may irritate some pupils and pass unnoticed by others. Certain physical qualities may excite admiration in one group and attract no particular attention in another. There are also differences in the preferences and expectations of individual pupils. Some will, therefore, admire; some will criticise and many will suspend judgment while they investigate further the qualities of the newcomer.

The second method employed is observation of behaviour. "Does he know the ropes?" "Has he done it before?" "Is he nervous?" "Can he speak so that I can hear him?" "Are his rate and his voice such that I can listen to him without weariness?" "Does he notice that I am here?" "Does he see me?" "Is he interested in me?" A successful teacher is accepted by the school community because of his essential oneness with them in certain of their attributes and activities; but they ask more of him than that. They wish also a confidence born of competence and previous experience along the lines on which he proposes to lead them. And they are quite aware that these qualities are revealed partly through visible behaviour; and that the pleasantness of class-room relationships will be greatly increased if the leadership offered is both definite and skilful. They wish also some degree of sympathy. They hope that the new teacher has a mind sufficiently "at leisure from itself" to look out upon them and show awareness of them—a personality able to react and to humour, to laugh with them as well as to guide them.

As a means of discovering the presence of this outward-looking sympathy, pupils use a third method of assessment. They begin to experiment. "Does he mean what he says?" "What will happen if . . . ?"

This is a most fascinating occupation. It is engaged in by children from very early infancy. It is not unknown to adults in workshop or factory.

"Will he notice if I speak?" ("Or is he concentrating completely on his own ideas and the subject-matter he wishes to expound?") "What will he do?" "Can he, safely, be made angry?" (Angry adults are entertaining—though slightly dangerous.)

The circumstances are very similar to those of any controlled experimentation. Miniature situations are deliberately devised. Careful observations are made; and if the teacher proves erratic, ill-informed, or self-absorbed, he has small chance of either acceptance or admiration. The initial attentiveness secured by his novelty will decrease steadily as the group discovers new

objects of greater interest and finds another leader more worthy of a following.

The methods employed by pupils in their study of the characteristics of a new teacher are not unlike those standardised in recent years by psychologists engaged on the assessment of temperament, personality or character. They may be summarised as follows :

- (1) a study of physical characteristics ;
- (2) an analysis of expressive movements—voice, gesture, eyes, mouth, gait, carriage, handwriting ;
- (3) examination of personal expression through speech, writings, dress, possessions, etc. ;
- (4) observation of conduct and of the frequency of laughter, anger, etc. ;
- (5) rating of traits by comparison with those of other human beings in the same group ;
- (6) experiments in miniature situations deliberately devised ;
- (7) tests of actual persistence, endurance, honesty, self-control, etc., in the course of ordinary living ;
- (8) a study of social background—family, school, community—in so far as this can be observed.

It is not proposed here to discuss each of these in detail. Many excellent books on the topic are readily accessible.¹ Suffice it to say that such methods are informally and continuously employed in the processes of assessment, interaction and mutual adjustment which form part of the educative influences perpetually exerted by human beings upon one another in the social relationships of the home, the school or the community.

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CHAPTER II

THE TEACHER BEGINS TO STUDY THE CLASS: A MEASUREMENT OF INTELLIGENCE

THE teacher, like the pupil, is a student of psychology—trying to understand human nature and human behaviour. And, like the pupil, whatever his other preoccupations, he is engaged upon a continuous assessment of the qualities of the members of the school community.

It is, however, probably true to say that he is more concerned in the first place with the estimation of brightness or intelligence than with the diagnosis of personality or the interpretation of conduct. He is interested in the educability of his pupils. "Will I be able to teach them, to train them, to lead them, to change them?"

"How do their minds work?"

"A big class."

"All sorts of youngsters."

"I'll never know them all."

"What shining eyes they have!"

"A sulky face in the far corner."

"That one talks too much."

"I like the look of the little dark one."

"There's a quick one just beside the door."

"But they're not so bright as last year's group."

Estimation of intelligence has taken certain fairly defined forms—most of which are reflected in the first impressions of any teacher on his first meeting with any class.¹

Indirect assessments come first—the shape of the face (forehead, nose, chin), the outline of the head (the bumps as they used to be studied by the phrenologists), the expression of the face, physical peculiarities of movement, gait or carriage, the nature of the hands, the bodily proportions in general. Such things, to a greater or less degree, are regularly noted by most people as a means towards the prediction of probable performance; and it is not surprising that in the history of intelligence testing observations of this type represented the first steps in objective estimation. In the latter part of the nineteenth century such descriptions of physical characteristics were supplemented by investigations into the powers of the body as shown in sensory discrimination and accurate movement. And at a still later date these investigations were followed by researches based on the expectation that brighter pupils would show greater accuracy

and speed in the exercise of various powers of the mind. Mental qualities were more and more judged by mental symptoms.

The teacher face to face with a new class does not, of course, pause to realise that he is following the course taken by several generations of research workers; but he does judge his pupils first by their looks and their movements and only later—as he comes to know them better—by an assessment of their performance.

“How much of this can you remember?”

“What did you see when I said that word?”

“Say these words after me.”

“Say these numbers after me.”

“Look at this drawing. I am going to ask you to reproduce it for me from memory.”

“How quickly can you do this exercise?”

“Which of these things has no connection with the others?”

“What is the meaning of this word?”

“Is there anything silly in this statement?”

“Which is the biggest of these numbers?”

“Arrange these in order of weight.”

“This is older than that and that is twice as old as these. Which is the oldest?”

Tests of memory, of visual imagery, and of attention were followed by tests devised to measure reasoning ability and the use of the mind in classification, definition, detection of absurdities, comparison, arrangements of ideas in sequence, deduction and the like.²

Much material of this kind is inevitably included in the ordinary experiences of classroom or club—almost irrespective of the actual subject-matter under review—and little by little the outlines of the picture are filled in. The teacher comes to believe that he knows his class. “Nothing they do will surprise me. I now know them through and through.”

There are, however, two disturbing factors. A teacher may make mistakes. He may entertain a prejudice against red hair, a Roman nose, slow responses, a garrulous tongue; and, influenced by such things, he may condemn a pupil to undeserved neglect. A teacher also may be—and usually is—very closely confined to one classroom or one club. He does make comparisons. “This class is on the whole better-looking than the group I had last year.” “These club members are less friendly than those.” His comparisons, however, are within a very narrow framework. They are subjective—dependent upon his own passing opinion. They lack objectivity and impartiality.

The same sort of difficulty is encountered in the assessment of achievement. A teacher, for example, having worked with

a class for a term, sets an examination and (full of hope) proceeds to the marking of the results. The first papers he reads are very poor. One pupil after another is incomprehensibly stupid and ill-informed. It is most depressing. Then a change occurs. The later responses are much more sensible. The second half of the class gains marks distinctly above those accorded to the first half.

It is possible, of course, that the papers of the weaker pupils happened to be collected at the top of the pile. Or it may have been that Mr. Jones, who did the marking, changed his standard as he worked through the bundle. Evidence on these possibilities can very readily be secured by re-marking each paper—beginning on the second occasion with those which were dealt with at the end of the first assessment. Estimation of the average of the two marks so obtained will probably go far to eliminate internal inconsistency.

It may have been, however, that the class was a very poor class (or that Mr. Jones was a very severe marker). Evidence on this can be got only by comparison with other classes and with the scores given by other examiners.

Such comparison of standards of achievement and of assessment can now be made with much more certainty than was possible even twenty-five years ago. It is not necessary here to describe the researches that have contributed to this development.³ Suffice it to say that three observations have made it possible :

- (1) Tests can be tested by trying them on representative samples in comparable groups.
- (2) Test results of representative samples when graphed fall roughly into a shape which has been described as the curve of normal frequency.
- (3) The validity of a measure can be estimated by comparison of its results with those of some other accepted test ; and the reliability of a test can be judged by its internal consistency (through comparison of alternate answers or estimation of the degree of its correspondence with itself on repetition).

Before testing children with a test it seems only reasonable to test the test on children. Before saying that a normal ten-year-old "should" be able to answer a certain question, it seems a simple matter to think of trying the question on a representative group of similar pupils of comparable age, country and circumstances. If about three-quarters of the ten-year-old pupils can answer it, it seems fair to say that it is a question suitable for pupils of "mental age" ten. Such a procedure had been suggested in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but it was not

until the first years of the twentieth century that Binet popularised the proposal. Since then a technique has been devised which has made possible the construction of "scales" for skills such as composition, writing and drawing and of tests for abilities such as reading, arithmetic, spelling, manual dexterity or general intellectual competence.

This technique includes the application of the second and third observation mentioned above. A very simple experiment will demonstrate the normal scatter of representative test results. If a randomly selected group of pupils be asked to make dots in rows on a piece of paper for thirty seconds it will be found that very few tap very slowly, very few attain the maximum rate and the majority make a record which falls somewhere in the middle.

The same sort of distribution is found when objective measurement is made of almost any human attribute—mental, physical, social or emotional—in an unselected sample of the population. It may be expected to appear if the construction and the marking of a new test have made it largely independent of the personal prejudice, the inconsistency or the limited experience of the teacher or the examiner.

By graphing results a teacher can discover to what extent the scores of his group seem to conform to the distribution of normal frequency. By comparing his distribution with that obtained from the use of a test already standardised he can obtain some idea of the suitability of his examination and the impartiality of the assessment he has made. The development of statistical formulæ by which the degree of correspondence or relationship between two such measures can be expressed in mathematical symbols (instead of in mere verbal descriptions) has done much to render possible a science of human measurement. Through use of the findings of this science ⁴ a teacher can escape from the limitations consequent on his own confinement in one classroom as well as from the uncertainties of his own judgment with its known liability to personal bias.

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CHAPTER III

A DIGRESSION ON INSTINCTS AND RELATED TOPICS

A TEACHER'S first question when he faces a new class may have been, "How do their minds work?" His second (and it comes with great speed) is, "What sort of human beings are they?" A similar progression may be traced (by those who are interested in such sequences) in the history and content of psychology.

"Psychology" began by being a study of mind. Through many centuries it was an off-shoot from philosophy and metaphysics. Its emphasis was on the nature of mind and the processes involved in thinking. Its methods were those of theorising and introspection. Only towards the end of the nineteenth century did it turn wholeheartedly towards observation of individuals, recording of behaviour, and experimentation; and it is no accident that it is only since the beginning of the twentieth century that it has received the status of an independent study in most of the Universities of the world.

"What sort of human beings are they?" "What are human beings like?" To answer these questions the teacher (like psychologists in general before him) often looks first at the individuals who make up his class. What are their attributes or characteristics? They can feel, perceive, understand, imagine, judge, reason, remember, act. They have sensations, perceptions, thoughts, imagination, judgment, reasoning, memory, will-power. From the earliest recorded discussions up to those of the end of the nineteenth century the main interest of educators seems to have centred upon such "faculties" and their employment in the educative process.¹

Teaching was assumed to be concerned with training in the use of mental faculties; and books on psychology dealt with subjects such as sensation, perception, cognition, imagination, memory, reasoning, attention, will. Mention was also made of emotions and impulses, but relatively little emphasis was laid upon these, and their importance for the educator was believed to be small. Information upon all these topics was amassed by introspection, and generalisations were supported by observation of humanity from the safe shelter of a library or a study.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, for a variety of reasons, writers upon education became more interested in what is now called "clinical" study. Psychologists founded

"laboratories", and began to apply methods of exact observation and controlled experiment to the study of psychology and (at a much later date) to education. The first psychological clinics were opened. Teachers brought pupils—at first as "subjects" for experimentation and later as "patients" who might be helped in the light of the findings of the new "child study". Some young psychologists began to concern themselves with experiments on animals. Others took training as physiologists and others turned back to psychology after qualifying as alienists or specialists in criminology.² From all these other sciences something was learnt, and almost insensibly the connotation of the word "psychology" changed and its field widened to that of the study of human nature as a whole.

One consequence of this change in viewpoint was an increased interest in inherited characteristics and innate endowment. Behaviour which is commonly called instinctive is readily observable amongst animals. It was assumed that a comparable innate, universal or instinctive pattern of behaviour characterised human beings; and, in the early years of the twentieth century, enthusiastic study was therefore given to instincts such as—

the parental or protective instincts,
the instinct of appeal,
the food-seeking instinct,
the mating instinct,
the gregarious instinct,
the instinct of combat,
the acquisitive instinct.
the instinct of curiosity,
the constructive instinct,
the instinct of repulsion,
the instinct of escape,
the instinct of self-assertion,
the instinct of submission.

The most popular exponent of the new point of view among British and American psychologists was probably McDougall;³ but its influence may be traced in the writings of William James, Burt, Drever, and many others; and its effect may be noticed in discussions on education in books by such British workers as Nunn, Ross, Hughes, Hadfield.⁴

The meaning given to the word "instinct" in most of these discussions is clearly defined by Burt in the opening article of a recent symposium published in the *British Journal of Educational Psychology*⁵—

a complex inherited tendency, common to all members of a species, impelling each individual (1) to perceive and pay attention to certain

objects or situations, (2) to become pleasurable or unpleasurably excited about those objects whenever they are perceived, and (3) thereupon to act in a way likely in the long run to preserve the individual, or at any rate the species, so acting.

The importance of the concept was that it permitted some explanation to be given of human activity, and of the sudden outbursts of energy and emotional excitement which are observable characteristics of human behaviour. The things or events that provoke such outbursts were held to derive their power from the fact that they appealed to primitive instincts; and these instincts (inherited from animal ancestors) were believed to form the foundation of individual character as well as the commonest sources of crime. The task of the teacher was to make allowances for them, utilise them and adapt all educative endeavours to them.

This emphasis on instinctive forces and impulses—unpremeditated, unreasoning and imperfectly understood—provided a most valuable corrective to the excessively intellectual approach of earlier writers and led to increased awareness of the need for the study of emotions as well as of ideas—of feelings and unconscious motives in addition to deliberate intentions and ideals. Teachers and parents became more alive to the complexity of their responsibilities; and it became more usual to admit the occurrence of behaviour which appeared to be irrational and of whose origins the individual was unaware. This was a great advance upon mere philosophic meditation upon mental faculties. It may be noted, however, that it was in essence an emphasis on “original nature” and, while it provided a practicable scheme of classification and inference, it was based upon the study of individuals as things-in-themselves, observable as separate entities. It encouraged a labelling of individuals as timid, aggressive, submissive, repressed, conscious of inferiority, self-centred or introverted, outward-looking or extraverted, and it led to an emphasis on the inherited character, the consistency and the fixity of such behaviour patterns. It was assumed, for example, that from the behaviour of a child’s brothers, sisters or parents it was possible to infer what would probably be the child’s own behaviour even when the training and the social influences to which he had been submitted had been altered or improved, that because a child started and turned pale at a sudden noise he would therefore probably be afraid of large animals, of strange human beings, of novel situations and of all the other stimuli for fear, and that his behaviour at later stages would in such respects closely resemble his behaviour in early infancy. Troublesome behaviour was accounted for as arising mainly from the excessive intensity with which one or more of these emotional

impulses had been inherited by a particular individual ; while temperamental apathy was believed to result from an innate condition in which the fundamental instincts and emotions were too weak and inert.⁶

Such consistency, fixity and independence of environment do not, however, on closer inspection, characterise the behaviour of children in most families and most schools. Human beings do not always remain in the categories in which they are placed ; and clinical psychologists have had to admit that the same individual may in one set of relationships appear as aggressive and in another as submissive—in one situation he may be an introvert and in another an extravert. A pupil may be conscious of inferiority in a gymnasium and of superiority in a class-room. He may be timid in a situation involving swimming and bold on the football field. He may appear shy and repressed in one set of circumstances and excitable and assertive in another. His behaviour patterns may also change as the years pass. He may become better adjusted, more balanced, more resolute ; and in all these respects an orphan may appear to resemble very slightly the parents he has never known.

In consequence it has had to be acknowledged⁷ that human instincts are “pliant and uncertain tendencies, seeds that may never spring up” and that neither delinquency nor neurosis is due exclusively to inborn constitution nor yet to shocks and mal-adjustments in the remote past, but may spring largely out of contemporaneous conditions and conflicts.

These observations of clinical psychologists have been confirmed by anthropological and sociological studies of the differing behaviour-patterns which are observable in different societies and in different ages.⁸ The terms used by writers in discussion of instincts are useful enough as descriptive of the various potentialities of human beings. They are misleading and inadequate when applied, as they often are, as explanatory of the wide variety of responses to comparable situations in different centuries or in different districts. Much behaviour which used to be called instinctive is therefore now considered to be more fairly described as “learned”—built up or “conditioned” by the experiences to which an individual has been subjected. Many of the similarities which are observable seem to be accompanied by recognisable similarities in environment ; while differences appear to be concomitant with different traditions and different material surroundings.

It may be of interest to note that, with the support of such psychological and sociological evidence, a comparable criticism has, for similar reasons, in recent years been directed against Freudian interpretations of the results of psycho-analysis. It is

unnecessary here (and would be somewhat irrelevant) to describe in detail the history and the development of Freud's technique or the skill with which he drew popular attention to the significance of the unconscious in human thought and action. Suffice it to say that his has been one of the most influential of the instinctivistic schools of psychology—particularly in countries where other theories of instinctive motivation were strongly emphasised.⁹ His interpretation took a highly specialised form; but in essence his method was that of a doctor treating a patient as an individual in a consulting-room.

He admitted the importance of environmental handling in the first few years of life, but over-emphasised the biological origins of present behaviour; and he laid too slight a stress on present attitudes, interests and wishes in their relation to the social group of which an individual forms a part. Man to him was fundamentally anti-social, absorbed in the search for gratification of biological drives; and the task of the educator was to suppress as far as necessary certain basic impulses which were postulated as fixed and as virtually the same in every member of the species.

With other psychologists of the opening years of the twentieth century, Freud played an important part in reaffirming the reality of emotional conflict, and re-emphasising the difficulties involved in modifying human behaviour; but his individualised methods are now being supplemented by group methods utilising the therapeutic value of impersonal discussion of common problems¹⁰ or superseded by studies which rely upon observation and treatment of the child in the nursery, the person in his family, or the worker in and through his occupation.¹¹

Study of human beings as organisms with instinctive tendencies is important as a reminder of the probable limits of educability. Observation of the behaviour of these organisms in varying situations is even more relevant to the understanding of human nature as it functions amid the realities of home life or school life. The teacher, the parent and the psychologist, in so far as they observe life as a whole, have to pass from a study of individuals seen one by one at any given time to an awareness of individual behaviour as it appears in the shifting groups, and changing social relationships which characterise a school, a home, or a community.*

* The use of the word "instinct" in descriptions of behaviour—whether of human beings or of animals—has too often been followed by a cessation of observation and a stifling of the spirit of enquiry. It seems desirable to substitute for this word a descriptive term whose content carries less emphasis on individual past behaviour and hypothetical "original nature" and is less liable to lead to the assumption that little can be done in the way of modification of present outstanding characteristics.