

What Is a Qualitative Environment?

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Three aspects of a good environment for learning are discussed by L. Thomas Hopkins, Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

MANY experts hold that a speaker or writer should very early take the audience into his confidence by telling them clearly and directly the basic viewpoint from which he will address them. Thus listeners or readers can focus more of their experience favorably or unfavorably in the author's direction. For each individual sees, listens, reads with his own meanings or as one author puts it, "with his own selector system," which is derived from his own experiences. The writer assumes that every individual is born into an environment; that he grows up into, with, through an environment; that the environment affects him and he in turn affects it, and that without each other neither can exist. Therefore the topic before us will be discussed under three major headings. First, What is the environment in which a child is born and reared? Second, What do we mean by quality in an environment or qualitative environment? Third, How can this quality in the environment best be promoted, or perhaps developed, or better still achieved?

ENVIRONMENT: ALL THAT AFFECTS BEHAVIOR

There is general agreement that environment in the broadest sense is anything that affects behavior. But there is difference of opinion as to what are

the most important factors in producing such behavior. Every situation that an individual faces has at least three aspects. One of these is himself—his operating self regardless of his stage of conscious differentiation. A second aspect is the conditions outside of himself which impinge upon him at the moment and with which he must deal. The third is the process by which he relates himself to the external conditions in order to relieve tension instigated by the situation.

Some persons believe behavior is caused by environmental factors and conditions external to the self in various life situations. They think of these factors as the total configuration of social fields which constitute the surrounding life of a person or of a group. Thus environment is any group of external factors potentially capable of influencing the behavior of an individual. And the individual does not have to be consciously aware of these influencing factors. For he can do little to change them or their relation to himself since they have an organization over which he has no control whether or not he recognizes them. And many persons hold that the influence of the environment of which the child is unaware in the early years of life is more potent in shaping his behavior than many of the factors of which he

is conscious. This means each individual is more or less a creature of his environment for his behavior is to a large extent determined by these external conditions. Thus some person or persons outside of him can select and arrange environmental stimuli so as to produce in him the kind of behavior which they desire. This external approach to behavior or this concept of the relation of environment to behavior is the one which dominates the entire program of education in schools from the first grade through the graduate schools.

Behavior as Need Satisfaction

Other persons think of behavior as need satisfaction or better as need fulfillment. All behavior is an attempt to satisfy need. Regardless of the disturbance which may command the attention of the individual at the moment, there is only one long-time need which everyone tries to satisfy from birth to death. It is to preserve, develop, enhance, mature the phenomenal self. These persons think of the environment from the standpoint of the individual's facing the situation and not from the standpoint of the external observer's appraising the relationship of behavior to external conditions as he sees both of them. So they sometimes define the environment as anything to which the individual pays attention, regardless of the nature of, degree of, or effect of such attention. Thus the environment represents those elements to which the individual responds whether such response be internal or external. Those conditions for which he has no sensitivity elicit no response and therefore are not a part of his environment. For him

such factors have no meaning and therefore do not exist. So environment represents those aspects of the phenomenal field which the individual is sensitive to, reacting to, or interacting with at the moment. This very sensitivity of the organism is selective and therefore effective in determining what the environment is or shall be. And by this very selective relationship in the satisfaction of need the organism creates its own environment. So the environment which the individual selects is all important in his behavior. Fortunately for him and for others, he does not always select the well ordered, highly organized, external conditions arranged for him by outside persons who wish to control his behavior.

A third factor in environment is the process by which the individual relates himself to conditions external to himself. For his growth requires all three. And whether a person emphasizes the external conditions or the internal factors as being relatively more important in behavior, each must assume some process, for neither the individual nor his external environment can exist independently of each other. It is this process on which the quality of the environment rests.

TENDENCY TOWARD CONTINUED MATURITY

Every normal child is born a unified organism operating internally by, through or on a cooperative interactive process. All of the parts perform their functions in relation to the over-all regulations of this wholeness which is to maintain and develop himself in the new external world. Thus each child is born a living example of or-

ganic quality or of the highest form of cooperative interaction known to man. His problem is to grow up in the new world so as to use the same cooperative process in his external environment which he uses so effectively in his internal relations. In the early years he is helpless and therefore dependent upon persons outside of him for his very existence. Even though he cannot recognize others, he expects this dependence to be a cooperative interaction operating under the same principles of growth which produced him from the simple fertilized egg. This means that the relationship must be creative, self-selective, self-controlled and emotionally satisfying to him—the child. So the mother modifies existing external conditions to the end that the emotional self of the child may unconsciously feel and accept the outward extension of its own basic biological growth process. Thus in these early years is laid the basis for the cooperative adult self.

As the child becomes conscious of his environment, this cooperative dependent relationship with his parents gradually evolves into cooperative interdependence. Here a new world opens for the child and for others around him. He becomes increasingly aware of himself as distinguished from others. He begins to develop those meanings and attitudes which place him in the center of his psychological field. Some of the learnings of his earlier dependent period are remade so that his whole environment becomes more differentiated and better clarified. He becomes more aware of his needs, what he wants to do, what his purposes are, and he has clearly defined ways by

which he satisfies them. He wants to expand his field through new kinds of experiences with new and interesting things. He begins to learn that his behavior has consequences which he must absorb, so he gradually looks for antecedents better to determine present action. All of these mean that he is finding and developing himself within his own expanding phenomenal field which is his world and for him the only world in existence.

The parents and others are the external environment of the child. They must help him find, develop, accept himself. They must help him move in an ever wider relationship with people in order that he may better understand himself and at the same time have more of the outside world with which to satisfy his needs. So the parents must teach him or help him live by a process of relating himself to the expanding world while at the same time improving his own maturity and self-enhancement. This calls for a higher, more conscious, more deliberative form of cooperative action, even the beginnings of group interaction, especially if the family operates on the cooperative group basis. The child gradually comes to use and accept group planning and group self-management as the basis for such planning. Only such a cooperative environment can extend and enrich the quality of the cooperative interactive process with which he was born.

The school carries the cooperative interdependence of the family to higher levels. Here the youngster has his great opportunity for intensive and continued group living. Through it the school helps him better understand and

accept himself, extend his experiences in many and varied areas, recognize, believe in and use the cooperative group process in all of his relationships with his world, internal and external. The school environment should be such as to (1) help him release his earlier unconscious behaviors better to see them in relation to his maturing self, (2) help him become more sensitive to people and why they act as they do, and (3) help him work with others to satisfy common needs by an ever better process of deliberative action with all that such action implies. By the time he reaches physiological maturity the individual should already be in the stage of independence where he can accept himself and work with others by a process which promotes the continued maturity of everyone. For mature behavior has no fixed end and no limits other than those imposed on each other because of the inadequacy of the process.

AN ENVIRONMENT FOR DEVELOPING MATURITY

There is no one best way by which this qualitative educational environment can best be achieved either in the home or in the school. For too many variable factors are involved. Moreover, there is no best way by which it can be examined or studied or tested. One can safely say, however, that the evidence of quality is found both in the maturing behavior of each person, young or old, and in the tendency toward continued maturity which the process of maturing implies. Therefore these suggestions are merely characteristics of an environment which facilitates the upbuilding of the self. Or, they are

suggestions to the adults in his external field on how to facilitate the cooperative group process by which he emerges from childhood dependence to adult independence.

- They must help him discover, interpret, clarify his own needs which are really disturbances of himself. Through them he remakes the self and his entire phenomenal field. Only the self-remaking-its-field learning in the direction of self-enhancement has quality.

- Each self must have freedom to express itself in interaction in organic need groups. Only by such interactive expression can any individual discover and improve himself while helping others do likewise.

- Adults must help each child constantly expand his phenomenal field through new experiences related to his emerging needs. While they make them available, the child selects, manages and evaluates them in relation to his needs and purposes. In other words, he does not accept them when adults want him to, neither does he take from them what adults wish him to select. He controls both the time and the value.

- Each child must have freedom to self-select from his experiences those learnings which are of value to him. He will do this because biologically he must do it. The adult should help him make selections which he can use to re-integrate himself on higher operating levels.

- Adults should help each child become increasingly aware of the cooperative group process used in all of his actions. He should understand both how and why it works to de-

velop both a group drive and a group quality of intelligence which transcends at the moment that of any one interacting individual, young or old. And he should feel in it the security which is the basis for his adult independence.

- Finally the members of a group help each other manage their own experiences in relation to their common and individual needs by coop-

erative group planning. The teacher or parent or other adult is the expert in such process who guides children in its use permissively and affectionately until all are *free* to continue their own growth and development for the benefit of themselves and their fellow men. This is the meaning of infancy, this the purpose of education, and this the qualitative environment.

Spring—and the Migrants

FRANCES MARTIN

A Michigan community provides educational and health services for migrant workers and their children, as described in this article by Frances Martin, Professor of Psychology and Education, Central Michigan College of Education, Mount Pleasant.

"EACH child in our democracy has a right to teachers who like and respect him as an individual and who will help him plan and prepare for what he may become." The professor spoke earnestly. Glancing around at the faces of seniors in the class in education, her eyes lingered on the face of Rosa Romanez. Here was understanding and appreciation. Rosa, as usual, was the most intently interested member of the class. She participated in discussions with clarity and conviction. She read widely because she wanted to learn. She reached out for experiences. Intelligent and sensitive, she was indeed a joy to have in the class.

Rosa had come to Mt. Pleasant with her Spanish-American parents when she was a small child. She could tell of working in the beet fields in the broil-

ing sun. She could remember the promises made to her family by the labor recruiters. These promoters had assured her family that they would find comfortable homes, good pay and no racial discrimination. Theirs had been, indeed, a glowing picture. She could remember her family's bitter disappointment at finding, instead, an inadequate, dirty shack with hard wooden beds, a cook stove which furnished the only heat, and hardships without end during that first year.

Rosa's father was a hard worker and was willing to learn new skills. He found work and remained in the community. Through the years other members of his family joined him, and together they made a place for themselves in the community life. Just this year a cousin of Rosa's had been elected

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