

## Our Best Defense . . .

**Our need is for people who are open to experience. Such persons are able to relax their defenses, to symbolize their experiences more accurately and more readily, and to make responsible decisions regarding the direction for their growth.**

A BABY is born and his four-year-old brother, Jimmie, is no longer able to care for himself. Maybe he starts anew to suck his thumb. Or he may be unable to feed himself. He begins to talk and to act like a two-year-old.

Janie is six and it is time to enter school. She becomes fearful, cries easily, hangs onto her mother and talks "baby-talk."

Dr. Sams received his doctorate in sociology and was full of ambition to change social conditions. But he moved too rapidly and found that he was no longer welcome in his first position. In his next position he was more careful. He made elaborate assignments from the textbook, stayed carefully "on the subject," and gave detailed examinations. As a teacher he was a bore and his students suffered. But he felt that he was safe from criticism and that he could justify his teaching methods.

Jimmie, Janie, and Dr. Sams are alike in at least one important respect; they are defending themselves in what they believe is a hostile world. And their recipes for defense are similar—"Go back to a time when you were safe and

when your behavior gained you the rewards you desired."

### Our World and Our Solutions

We Americans today believe that we live in a hostile world. So we feel defensive and all too willing to retreat to a time when we were in a less vulnerable position. We reason that, "Education is supposed to prepare us to meet our problems, and this we cannot now do. Let us turn back the clock to the educational system we had when we did not feel so vulnerable. Let's get back to the fundamentals"—the fundamentals being in this case the things we learned at the time we felt safe and secure. In effect we are saying, "Let's look backward for our solution."

But even a casual review of history shows us that our best methods of defense are to be found by looking forward. The crossbow overcame bows and arrows. Gunpowder made both obsolete. Nuclear fusion replaced atomic fission. The jet succeeded the propeller craft and the guided missile may replace both. Surely our best defense is to be found by looking forward and exercising initiative, imagination, curiosity and intelligence.

"Getting back to the fundamentals"

<sup>1</sup> The author is indebted to many people for much of the theoretical discussion in this paper but especially to Carl R. Rogers of the University of Wisconsin.

represents the opposite approach. It says in effect, "The way to survive is to give all people the same education, which should consist of telling them what the important facts are and how things are being done now and have been done in the past." In this sense, intelligence is measured by the ability to give the "right" or expected response. But is this really intelligence? When measured in this way original and creative responses, instead of adding to our intelligence, subtract from it. So a person is intelligent in this sense when he gives the same response as many other people or the response agreed upon by a group of experts as the correct response. And this sort of preparation leads people to rely on the expert, to search for the correct answer, and to suppress original and creative responses. Carried to its ultimate, it suggests that our continuing development should cease. Is it little wonder that when intelligence is looked at in this way, high IQ is not necessarily an indicator of genius or of potential creativity? We know that the innovator is not necessarily the high IQ person.

Creativity, imagination and uniqueness of behavior do not stem from an education that insists on people's seeing things in one or a few ways. These characteristics come from the capacity to see things in many different ways. The person who is in a position to make unique and creative responses is the one who is open to experience—his own present, past, and anticipated future experience as well as the experience of other people—and open also in his ability to interpret these experiences.

### Our Changing World

But "looking backward" for our solutions to problems is inadequate for another reason. We live in a changed

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country with a changed "way of life." Not many years ago most of our daily efforts were bent toward subsistence and physical survival. The average man spent most of his week in working to feed, clothe, and house his family. Today, the average man spends less than half of each week in achieving his subsistence and he now looks for ways of living the rest of his time with a minimum of boredom. Any excess purchasing power which he has is spent for a higher material standard of living. But he is not really satisfied with this way of life because he suspects that he is not using his potential to the utmost.

His education, though, was and is directed primarily at subsistence. We have said to him, in effect, "If you will know these things and do these things in these ways, you will be better able to afford to buy what you need for subsistence. You will have an easier life than your father had." But today we live at a subsistence-plus level.

Another factor complicates the picture. As little as 15 years ago we thought we could reasonably predict the future. It was not entirely unrealistic when we said, "Learn these facts and how to do these things and you will be successful." And things changed slowly enough that once we had completed a formal education we were able to learn how to change in a slowly changing world. Today, change is greatly accelerated. In almost any area it is difficult for us to predict what will be important or how we will perform 10 years from now. Furthermore, it has become increasingly apparent that we should not prepare people either for an unchanging world or to

change with a changing world, but that *we must prepare people to change our world* in directions agreed on by many people.

So we really can't look backward for our solution as some people have suggested. Our world is changing as well as our ability to satisfy our needs. We need people who can exercise intelligent, imaginative, and creative behavior.

### The Open Person

As was suggested earlier, our need is for people who are open to experience; their own experience as well as that of other people. Why? Because these people seem to have characteristics which enable them to work successfully with other people in promoting solutions to the increasingly complex problems which face us. Open people are able to use their potentials in intelligent, imaginative and creative behavior. What are these people like?

If one word would suffice to describe open people it is "congruence." The open person is congruent in at least two important ways. First, his present view (perception) of his past experience bears a high relationship to the experience he had in the past and to his organic sensation of the experience at that time. He is able to recall his experience in awareness and his recall is as accurate as the experiential data will permit. He has no defensive need to deny or to distort his experience. Second, he is congruent in that there is a high relationship between his present perceptions and his behavior. He does not think, feel or believe in one way while behaving in another.

Because he trusts his recall of his experience, his locus of evaluation is within himself. He does not rely on other people to decide or to judge for him.

Since he is closer to the data, he is best equipped to judge for himself. He meets each situation with the unique and creative behavior required of the newness of that moment.

We might ask, "Why is the open person that way?" The answer seems to lie at least partly in other characteristics he possesses. Of primary importance is the way in which he views himself—his unconditional positive regard. He places no conditions on his worth as a person. His feeling is that, "I am a worthwhile person with dignity and integrity." Because of this he does not need to distort his recall of his past experience or his perception of his present experience. For this reason, too, he values his own decisions and judgments.

Of equal importance is his unconditional, positive regard for other people. Because he places no conditions on the worth of other people he is able to share their experience with them. The experience of other people becomes a part of his experiential data. Because he does not place conditions on the worth of other people he is able to exhibit congruence between his present perceptions and his behavior. He says both by his words and by his behavior, "I will value you regardless of what you are like or even if you are uninterested in the things which stimulate me most."

Here is the person we need. He has broad experience available to him without distortion. He is able to behave without fear of criticism or of what his actions will imply about the worth of other people. His experience is continually expanding and he bases his decisions on the meaning of that experience for him. He works successfully with other people and communicates deeply with them. He is able to make the unique responses required by the newness of the moment.

He is concerned with central rather than peripheral issues, with internal (involving himself, his own thoughts, values, wishes, etc.) rather than purely external issues, and with core problems rather than symptoms. His approach is positive and forward looking rather than negative, defensive, situational, or backward looking. His curiosity and imagination are those of a happy child. How did he get to be this way? Part of the answer lies in how we teach.

### The Teacher's Responsibility

If we teach for subsistence and adjustment, the teacher probably should be concerned primarily with assigning, drilling, hearing and testing to see that youngsters have learned the correct things and learned them in large enough quantity. Naturally, there is a danger of producing closed people by these techniques since we learn what are supposedly the "right" answers and the "right" ways of doing things. Since these are "right," other ways must be "wrong." When the teacher permits less academic behavior to occur he does it for motivational purposes or to reduce boredom. When he permits children to follow their own interests, it is usually as a reward for academic work well done.

In this sort of teaching a child is rewarded for giving the response and doing the things judged as best by a significant other person (in this case the teacher). The teacher places conditions of worth on the student and makes the important decisions for him. The child begins to distrust his own desires and worthwhileness. He distorts his own experience to make it more consistent with what he is told by the significant other. Since he is not usually allowed to follow his own interests, he begins to see himself as unimportant and perhaps as

worthless. He begins to defend himself and thus becomes closed to further experience.

If we teach for openness the teacher's responsibilities are different. He seeks to establish a climate of concern for differences and acceptance of these differences. He assumes that children want to learn, to grow, to develop and to make the most of their abilities. He sets no conditions on the worth of children. His primary concerns are represented by two questions: "What is really of concern to you?" and "What do you intend to do about it?" Evaluation of pupils is not directed at, "How much of the 'right' things did you learn?" but at, "How responsible a job did you do on the things that we agreed were important?" In this teacher's classroom the child is eager to express his interests and his different ways of perceiving. He recognizes that other people do not always agree with him but he does not think less of them or of himself for it. He is free to explore, to learn, and to exercise imagination and creativity. He is open to new experience.

### The Conditions for Openness

We should probably take our thinking one step further. In general, what are the conditions which seem to pervade teaching for openness? Let us first look at an example of good teaching.

A high school science teacher, after spending some time with his class talking about the field of biology and the things which are of interest to biologists, asks his class, "How would you like to spend your time in this class? We can do many different things such as studying the text, developing class and individual projects, making field trips in relation to our class studies, and other things which

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• Cincinnati Public Schools. *World Geography*. Cincinnati: the Schools, 1958. 260 p. \$3.50.

The details of content and materials for a two semester elective course in world geography for grades nine and ten are presented in this bulletin. The topical and regional approaches to geography are combined. This makes the avoidance of repetition difficult and calls for special teaching skill. Much of the content is highly factual with little real development of critical man-land relationships. Annotated bibliographic and audio-visual lists are extensive. Format of the guide

is attractive, and includes good photographs.

• Junior High School Association of Illinois. *Extra-Class Activities in the Junior High School Grades*. Urbana; the Association, 1957. 54 p. \$1.00.

Extra-class activities are now justified by educators on the basis of their direct contribution to student growth. This publication presents first a description of related literature including opinions and practice. Data revealing the current status of extra-class activities in schools with grades 7-8-9 are presented. Schools with superior programs are described.

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you might suggest. We don't all have to do the same things. Maybe some of us will want to work together while others work alone. What seems most important to you at this time? I will help you in any way I can and if I can't help we may be able to get some other people to help us."

Here we have all of the conditions which are necessary for producing open people. The teacher, a significant other person, believes that the students want to grow, to learn, and to develop. The teacher places no conditions on the worth of the students but says, "I am ready to go with you in directions which seem important to us both." He does not say, "Because Sarah has made good grades in the past or has a high IQ, I am willing to trust her and give her freedom." Nor does he say, "After you have learned what is important to me, I will let you do some of the things which are important to you."

He has now set the stage for the de-

velopment of open people, but he must go further. As the children begin to think through the experience they desire, the teacher must be an effective and nonevaluative listener. He must see the child and his problems as the child does and he must attempt to communicate his understanding to the child. He must experience what the child experiences and perceive as he perceives as if these were his own experiences and perceptions but without ever losing sight of its "as if" nature.

If the child experiences this sort of empathic understanding given from a significant other who places no conditions on his worth, he is able to relax his defenses, to symbolize his experiences more accurately and more readily, and to make responsible decisions regarding the direction for his growth. He will grow toward being a more intelligent, a more imaginative, and a more creative person who has a forward looking desire to become a part of the solution to man's problems.

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