

## The Psychology of Becoming Human

*What one is like:  
what one should be like . . .*

THE humanities have always been valued in education because they are seen as holding, in a tangible way, the essence of humanness. It is believed that through the study of these fields a student can and will be liberated to actualize his human potential. However, merely reading great literature or memorizing poetry will not automatically bring such development. The study must have personal meaning to the student. Lacking such meaning, it becomes dehumanized to the point of alienating students. With this personal meaning it can enrich life and help man reach the greatness for which he aspires. In order to teach the humanities in such a way that they achieve this latter goal, we must look to processes by which humans develop and find meaning in their lives.

The ASCD 1962 Yearbook, *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming: A New Focus for Education*,<sup>1</sup> presents a number of ideas which are of critical importance for understanding healthy processes of development and behavior. In the following discussion, closely related ideas which

help to understand meaningful learning will be presented. These can be greatly enriched by reading the 1962 Yearbook.

All experience is filtered through a process of aware-ing (1). This new term has been coined, after much thought, as necessary in order to capture the dynamic on-goingness of an individual in the process of becoming human. Aware-ing is a complex process of evaluating all new information in the light of existing beliefs which are related to the new information. In addition to this intellectual kind of comparison, an individual's evaluation is influenced by the feelings which he has at the same time. As a result of aware-ing, the individual may accept and integrate the new information, he may distort it into an acceptable form, or he may reject it. In order to understand how this operates, it is necessary to develop some general model of the human self. This will then have implications for the teaching-learning process in the humanities.

A child is born with no knowledge of himself or of the world. Early experiences in the family lead to his identifica-

<sup>1</sup> Arthur W. Combs, editor. *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming: A New Focus for Education*, 1962 Yearbook. Washington, D. C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1962.

Walcott H. Beatty is Professor of Psychology, San Francisco State College, California.

tion of himself as a human, as a boy or a girl, as a person who can move, walk, talk, and so on. Most of these learnings come as a result of the way in which the family responds to the child. For example, they tell him he is a boy, and this is accompanied by a rich variety of expectations for his behavior. These appraisals, which are reflected to the child, are his major source of knowledge about himself and, to a large degree, his picture of the world. These reflected appraisals of his self are of two kinds, those which tell him what he is like and those from which he forms a picture of what he should be like. The appraisals of what he is like become organized as a *perceived self in the world*. The appraisals from which he develops his picture of what he should be like become organized as the *concept of adequate self in the world*. These two parts make up his concept of self. Since this is the only picture an individual has of his capabilities in the world, *the behavior of an individual is always consistent with his concept of self in the world*.

A moment's thought will make it clear that the two parts of the self concept are not identical. In a mature person there is overlap. The way in which he sees himself now with regard to performing many functions such as eating, dressing, reading, speaking, and other such matters may be exactly what he thinks they should be. In these areas the perceived self and the adequate self are identical. However, in his work, say as a teacher, he may see himself as doing certain things to help children learn, but, at the same time believe that he should be doing a better job of helping them to learn. In this case, the perceived self is discrepant from the concept of adequate self. Since an individual's self concept governs his behavior, he will be

dissatisfied with himself when the results of his actions do not match his picture of adequacy. This dissatisfaction will spur him to change his behavior. *Each person strives to reduce the discrepancies between his perceived and adequate selves in order to become more like his concept of an adequate self.*

In striving to become more adequate, an individual draws upon his past experiences to formulate goals. He also takes, from the situation which he is currently facing, cues related to the behaviors which will maintain or increase his adequacy in this situation. This, in effect, means that a person comes into any situation prepared to learn certain things and also, ready to resist, or ignore, those things which seem unrelated to his goals. Each person has formulated these goals from his own unique combination of experiences and, therefore, is prepared to learn or resist different things. Thus, *each individual is motivated to learn or to reject certain learnings when he enters the learning situation.*

When we talk about curriculum and the content of school experiences, we are talking about plans for fostering learning or, in some cases, stopping some directions of learning and reorienting them in different directions. The key question, then, which we would like to answer is how can experience in the humanities affect the directions which learning will take.

Since the concept of adequate self is the source of the motivation to learn, it may clarify the discussion if we look at the nature of the concept of adequate self with which a child enters the classroom. The pictures, or values, of adequacy can be seen as clustering around four nodal points. That is, if one looks at the behavior of the individual, there seem to be at least four distinctive kinds

of purposes which behavior is serving.

First, there is a cluster around the value of becoming worthy. Many of the appraisals which a child has experienced have reflected upon his worth or what he must be like to be worthy. Some of these are quite indirect in the form of love. If you are loved, you must be worthy. Other appraisals are much more direct; they are ones in which the child's behavior is labeled as good or bad. In any case, discrepancies build up between the child's picture of what he is and his conception of what he should be in order to be worthy. A segment of his behavior is oriented toward learning those skills, knowledges or behaviors which will give him reassurance from the world that he is worthy.

A second cluster of ideas representing adequacy lies around the value of coping or surviving. In order to be adequate one must be able to cope with the situations which arise in life. The emphasis of adults on the learning of certain skills and being able to answer certain questions builds this value into the concept of adequacy. Soon, the child will find large discrepancies between himself as he is and the picture he has developed of what an effective person is like. As the school demonstrates how skills and knowledge can enable better coping, he is motivated to learn them.

A third cluster in the picture of adequacy surrounds a value to which we have given far too little attention, the learning of behaviors which enable the expressing of the self. This tends to be more vague as a part of a child's concept of adequacy because all too often little effort is made in helping a child develop appropriate forms of expression. Our culture dislikes strong expressions of emotion and gives only feeble support to the art forms such as music, drama,

and painting which can evoke feelings through vicarious experience. Feelings and emotions are part of our biological inheritance and must find forms of expression.

There are many ways in which the schools could help to educate the emotions, but this whole area is usually left to chance as long as a child does not interfere with school activities by ways in which he expresses his self. In this case, the major discrepancy between the perceived self and the concept of adequate self lies in the child's awareness that it is unsafe, or at least difficult, to express the self adequately. At the same time, it is not easy for the child to formulate goals and find learning experiences which will enable more effective expression.

A fourth area in which there are again rather vague ideas of adequacy concerns the value of *creative-integrating*. These two words are combined because creative behavior seems to be aimed in the direction of finding satisfying relationships, drawing meaning from disparate facts, or establishing harmony where there is chaos. Being able to achieve integrations of this kind reduces discrepancies within the self and leads to greater adequacy. Another way of looking at this is to say that not only are there discrepancies between the perceived and adequate selves, but also within the perceived self and within the concept of adequate self. A person is motivated to learn ways of reducing these discrepancies, too.

The child who perceives himself as a "grown-up" eight year old and then becomes aware that some of his behavior is more like that of a dependent four year old will be motivated to learn appropriate eight year old behaviors as a substitute for less mature ways of doing

things. The creative-integrating value should not be confused with the value of becoming worthy. In the preceding example, if a teacher points out that he disapproves of the child's behavior, the child may be motivated to prove his worth but still may not change his immature behavior. If he sees for himself that there is a discrepancy, he will be motivated to change. Encouraging self evaluation will foster the creative-integrating aspect of a child's concept of adequacy. It is important to support change which is so motivated if we are to have mentally healthy and effective people in our society.

The four aspects of the concept of adequacy which have been described develop mainly through the process of identification. An individual who plays an important role in gratifying the needs and desires of the child becomes the model after which he patterns his concept of adequacy. In the early stages, the values of mother and father are taken over quite directly as the child is capable of perceiving them or performing the appropriate behavior. Later when the child has begun to form his own pictures of adequacy and perceived self, he takes on those aspects of new models which are consistent with his self, but he resists those which are inconsistent. However, if a model, such as a teacher, forms a relationship with the child which stresses the idea that he wants to help the child to learn, then the child will be more open to new ideas. Specifically, if the teacher regards the child as valuable, tries to understand him, and also is able to express his own ideas openly without the intent of coercing the child, the concept of adequacy can grow (2).

Let us now look at the implications which this psychological model has for the teaching of the humanities in the

school. If we define the humanities broadly as those areas of crystallized experiences which most nearly represent man's values about himself, that is, the way in which various people have pictured the nature of man, then it is clear that a child has begun interacting with the humanities long before he arrives in school. He has begun to develop ideas about his worth, what one should be able to cope with, ways of expressing his self, and, by the time he gets to school, he is just beginning to get some integration or internal consistency of his pictures of his self in the world.

Art, literature and music are well established in the primary grades. As humanities, the purpose they serve should be the enrichment of experience. In terms of the psychological model we have described, they clarify and expand his conception of how humanness can be worthy and how he may express himself. This enrichment forms the backlog which in time he may draw upon in creating his personal integration. Teachers should not make demands that he use these materials for coping. That is, his responses to music, art or literature should not be graded and should be guided only to the extent that he seems to be asking for guidance. Hearing and discussing music and literature and playing with various art media should be the level at which the experiencing takes place. It is vital that teachers have developed their own interests and value these areas in human experience if they are to serve as models for the child's development.

At the intermediate grades, unfortunately, most of these activities either disappear or are given a subsidiary role. It seems highly likely that this discontinuity makes it difficult to reintroduce these fields in the high school years. There are many ways to maintain the continuity

while enhancing the meaning of the "hard-core" subjects. It is outside the scope of this article, but it can be convincingly argued that science, mathematics, and the social sciences are also humanities in the sense that they contain value positions about human nature or represent achievements of man in developing his human potential. Some of the kinds of activities which might combine these areas and maintain the continuity of the humanities would be using music as the basis for writing a paper or drawing a picture, drawing pictures of the feelings evoked by various words which are being learned, and looking at the life and times in which particular scientific developments took place and how they represented a creative attempt on the part of some individual to solve a problem.

If the continuity of values developed by the humanities has not been maintained, the child arrives at the secondary school with a peculiar distortion. His work in school since the third grade has all been tied to his value of becoming worthy through achieving and getting good grades or to his value of coping through the stress which has been placed on the practical uses of skills and knowledge. Therefore, the study of music, art, literature, and philosophy for enrichment is inconsistent with his concept of adequacy and his perceived self because it seems neither practical nor does it provide an important path to achievement. Being approved and being able to cope in practical matters have become disproportionately large in his concept of adequacy.

If we could assume that there has been some continuity from early experience, and that there is not too much resistance, it is still necessary to present courses in these areas in a way which is related to

the values which they can enhance for the individual. It should be clear from the outset that the purpose of these areas is *not* to enhance a youth's ability to cope directly with practical situations. The purpose is to deepen his understanding of the nature of man, to enable him to express his own needs more effectively, and to enable him to draw upon these understandings and skills in order to create a more effective integration within his own personality. With each of these purposes the actual outcome can be assessed only by the individual himself, and school grades are meaningless. They actually divert him from the real purposes because he tends to work with the material only to gain approval rather than to become personally more adequate. If we fail to cope with these problems, the subject matter will seem dry and irrelevant. We will be met with apathy and resistance by a large proportion of students, or we will develop students who are increasingly dependent upon others for approval.

In order to cope with this problem, we must take our cues from the characteristics of the adolescent. Descriptions of the developmental tasks of adolescents are one source of ideas about what they are like. One of the major discrepancies between the perceived self and the concept of adequacy which is in focus during this period lies in the area of independence. He has a picture of the adequate youth as being independent and able to make his own decisions; yet, he perceives himself as being dominated by teachers and forbidden to make any but unimportant choices. He is motivated to learn ways of being independent, and this frequently takes the form of defying the controlling adults. There seem to be a number of ways in which the various

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humanities, if taught for the purposes described above, can contribute to reducing the discrepancy between the perceived self and the concept of adequacy and thus enable a student to become more adequate.

Literature ranging from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* through Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* explores problems which can help youth resolve some of their own feelings through vicarious experience. Again, the purpose should be to enable the student to explore a problem and come to understand something about himself. This exploration should not be graded but rather understood and encouraged by the teacher. Various artistic media offer vicarious outlets for the frustration and anger which adult controls arouse. Music too, if it is not aimed at perfecting skills or "uplifting"

taste, can serve as an outlet for feelings. Much of the music currently popular with adolescents is in the same tradition as the folk songs and ballads of our cultural heritage. By giving recognition to such music, we may help youth to gain feelings of worth and of being understood. The key point which should be reiterated is that if the course content and the behavior of the teacher are consistently aimed at helping individuals to become more adequate, students will be motivated and will learn.

We have said, then, that the self concept guides an individual's behavior. This concept grows out of the interactions between the child and his world, and, most importantly, with the people who are reacting to him in a close relationship. As the self concept grows, there arise discrepancies within it, mainly between his picture of what he is like and his concept of what he should be like, but also within each of these two conceptions.

These discrepancies are the source of the basic motivation to learn. The learning which persists is that which reduces these discrepancies. Persisting learning in the humanities will take place only as it is presented in a way which helps the child to reduce these discrepancies and come to see himself as more adequate. Specifically, these learnings must help him increase his understanding of his worth as a human being, serve as a means of expressing his self, and provide a resource for the creative-integrating of his own personality.

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