

Emotions and Learning

Walcott H. Beatty

IN THE field of education, emotions are like the weather; everybody talks about them, but nobody does anything about them. Our culture does not approve of emotions. Not many years ago the prevalent attitude, and it still has influence, was that the emotions are part of our animal nature and must be overcome if one is to be civilized. Education was seen as the process by which the intelligence could be developed and thereby, "control" the emotions. With the introduction of Freud's ideas to this country in the early part of the century, those segments of psychology concerned with mental health and therapy have abandoned such notions and have come to embrace the belief that emotional development, including the appropriate expression of emotions, is the key to effective human functioning.

Educators have been slower to accept these ideas. This was demonstrated in 1928 by the Wickman Study (7) which showed a zero correlation between teachers' and clinicians' judgments about which child behaviors represented the most serious behavior problems. The study was repeated in 1951 (6). The amount of agreement between teachers and clinicians was greater than in 1928 but great disagreement still existed. Research over the past 50 years has clearly established the role that emotions play, both in the blocking and in the facilita-

tion of learning and in mentally healthy living.

It seems reasonable, at the very least, that every teacher should understand some of the basic facts about emotions, and that each has developed some skills at helping children express and understand their feelings. A future more full-blown step must be the development of an emotional curriculum to be integrated with our current intellectual curriculum.

Commitment to Values

One of the ways in which emotions play a role in our lives is that they support and determine the strength of commitment which we have to our values. The daily rewards and punishments which children experience as their behavior conforms to, or violates some adult value gives rise to feelings about the value. Gradually strong positive feelings develop toward this value and the child feels deep distress and guilt when his behavior violates it. Because of differing amounts of such reinforcement, different values take on differing amounts of "emotional loading" and become hierarchically organized from very strong to very weak.

A clear implication of this idea is that educators should be aware of which values they are reinforcing, and whether or not "key" values are developing their



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appropriate place in the hierarchy. A recent study points up this issue very dramatically and further raises the question, Is our present "thoughtless" method of reinforcing values achieving the results we really want?

At Yale University, Milgram (3) conducted a behavioral study of obedience. He recruited 40 subjects from New Haven and the surrounding communities. These were people between the ages of 20 and 50 and included postal clerks, high school teachers, salesmen, engineers, and laborers. In the experiment each subject was introduced to another person (actually an accomplice of the experimenter), and told that the two of them would participate in an experiment on the relationship between learning and punishment. One person would be the teacher and the other the learner. They drew names out of a hat to determine which role each played, but this was

rigged so that the naive subject always became the teacher. The teacher and learner were then taken to an adjacent room and the learner was strapped into an "electric chair" apparatus. An electrode was attached to the learner's wrist, and the subjects were told that it was attached to a shock generator in the adjoining room. The teacher was told that although the shocks might be extremely painful, they would cause no permanent damage.

The learning task consisted of the teacher's reading a series of word pairs to the learner, whom he could not see, and then reading the first word of the pair and giving four alternatives. The learner could respond with the alternative choice which he thought had been paired with this word by moving one of four switches which lighted a light on a board in front of the teacher. Also in front of the teacher was a panel with

30 switches. Each switch was labeled with the number of volts of shock it administered (so far as the "teacher" knew) to the learner. The first switch gave a 15 volt shock and each succeeding switch increased the amount by 15 volts up to 450 volts administered by the last switch. The teacher was instructed to go on to the next question if the subject gave the right answer, but to push a switch and give him a shock if he gave the wrong answer. Each new wrong answer was to be punished by the next higher shock.

The experiment was arranged so that the learner gave about three wrong answers for every one right answer. Thus, the level of shock supposedly being administered rose rapidly. It proceeded this way until the teacher moved the switch to administer 300 volts. At this point, the learner pounded on the wall of the room. The teacher usually turned to the experimenter at this point for guidance. He was

told to count the absence of an answer as a wrong answer after ten seconds and to administer the next higher shock. The learner's pounding was repeated at the 315 volt level, but after this he neither gave any answers nor made any sounds.

Most of the subjects showed signs of nervousness and tension. They were observed to sweat, tremble, stutter, bite their lips, groan, and exhibit nervous laughter. If they turned to the experimenter and indicated unwillingness to continue, he would urge them on. If the subject refused, the experiment was ended, and it was then explained fully to him. If he continued, the experimenter terminated the experiment when they had pressed the last, the 450 volt, switch. Several measures of their reactions were taken, and then the whole experiment was explained, and the subject had a reconciliation with the learner whom he had, presumably, been shocking.

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In this experiment two important values were clearly placed in opposition; the value of not hurting others, and the value of obedience. It was predicted in advance, by a number of psychologists, that few, if any, subjects would continue to the end of the experiment. The actual results were, that out of 40 subjects, five refused to continue beyond the 300 volt level, at which time the learners first pounded the wall. Seven more subjects stopped with one or two more shocks. The startling fact was that 26 of the subjects continued until they had administered the strongest shock possible. It was clear from the various emotional indices such as sweating, trembling, etc., that the subjects were experiencing tremendous disturbances as a result of the conflict, and yet, 26 subjects, 65 percent of the total, felt they must obey rather than respond to their more humanitarian feelings.

Education and Obedience

What part did education play in developing such strong feelings of obedience? Can we, as educators, afford to ignore longer the role which emotions play in human behavior?

This is not a new concern. The American Council on Education set up a committee in 1933 to examine the relation of emotion to the educative process. The report of this committee was published in 1938 (4). It contained an excellent review of most of the existing research on emotions and drew out of these the implications for education. Much research has been done since that time, and important new findings have emerged. These findings have extended our knowledge, but they have not really controverted the committee's findings. Let us look at their 1938 conclusions:

[The best method of maturing children is to provide them] a chance for the progressive accumulation of meaningful experiences that will reveal the world as it is. It means offering experiences that will orient children in the physical world, in the social world, in time, in aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual realities as far as we have discovered them. It means helping children to organize their experiences in generalizations, attitudes, and value concepts . . . It means granting them increasing responsibility to direct their own behavior, and it means challenging them with the world's unsolved problems as a means of evoking purpose.

No such complete survey has appeared since the above volume which might bring it up to date. The research in specific areas such as anxiety has been reviewed (5). Perhaps the most challenging current work relating emotions to education is that being done by Jersild (1, 2). However, the field is still wide open. We need to know whether or not certain teaching techniques or teachers are more prone to arouse anxiety than are others. Measures of emotional development must be devised. The relationships between therapy and education must be studied. In-service programs to increase the effectiveness of teachers in coping with emotions must be tried out and evaluated. The effectiveness of various media for learning ought to be evaluated in terms of how they involve the emotions. The appropriate age levels for specified kinds of emotionalized experience should be determined. Above all, we need more precise understandings of how we foster emotionalized commitment to attitudes and values.

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Why a Taxonomy—Darling

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omy serves to generate significant and worthwhile questions which need resolving. The question is, can they be resolved? The authors of the taxonomy claim that the central research problem is how to measure affective behavior with greater validity, reliability, and objectivity.

What behavior will serve as evidence that a child is showing *commitment to a value* rather than merely a *preference for a value*? How does a researcher determine when a child is achieving the *conceptualization of a value* which is affective behavior rather than only cognitive conceptualization? There are many big problems to be solved in order that the affective taxonomy be made researchable.

This is the task of researchers. The writers of the taxonomy have done their task. Now it is up to researchers and

practitioners to do the necessary changing and refining.

Why a taxonomy of affective learning? The taxonomy can serve as an aid in clarifying the school's responsibility for promoting learning in the affective realm. The taxonomy may provide practical help to teachers and curriculum workers. Finally, it may further the study of education.

If schools are to meet the needs of an ever changing society, the schools must be in a position periodically to change their educational objectives. The two taxonomies lend themselves well to this task because they give visibility, structure, and definition to objectives which represent current thinking. As the purposes of the schools change, so ought the taxonomies or their replacements.

Involvement—Liddle

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plays, pageants, and PTA spectaculars destroys the motivation of the vast majority of children who know that they will never be chosen. Let us realize that a finished production and a good learning experience are sometimes antagonistic. Let us decide whether drama, music, and similar activities are primarily public relations events or learning opportunities for children, and act accordingly.

The fact that we must educate children in groups rather than individually places some limitations on the degree to which we can build the curriculum on children's interests. Nevertheless, we should provide every child with some time to explore a subject of interest to him as deeply as he wants. Children are going to know more about some subjects than others when they arrive at high school and college. Let us stop lamenting this and start to encourage it.

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