

## Implications of Social Forces for Learner Growth

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**T**HEORISTS, researchers, and observers have collectively contributed to the educator a phenomenal amount of knowledge about socialization processes. Yet have we applied the knowledge? What do their findings tell us about teaching if our objective is to develop each learner to the limits of his potential?

The following are guidelines for teaching (a) which utilize knowledge of the influence of social forces upon the learner and (b) which will assist in the optimum development of the learner.

1. The objectives must be clearly understood by the learner. When the child enters school he has already very likely learned to desire the social rewards of acceptance, approval, and status. He knows that these are awarded in the degree to which performance fulfills expectations. The learner directs his energies toward achievement of objectives which will yield the desired rewards.

2. The learners who deviate from what is accepted as normal should be given social rewards. Even though deviants may threaten society as it is known, they may produce new products or new ideas that improve human existence. Riesman said that a culture without deviants is not known (1961, p. 241). It must be remembered that creativity is a form of deviancy. Creativity for the good of others is the aspect of deviant behavior that must be searched for and rewarded. The learner who is

ostracized will stop deviating or will stop contributing to the class his deviant ideas.

3. The learner with goals in conflict with the goals of the educational establishment should not have his views suppressed. Columbus and Galileo could have been called fanatics. Such persons may provide a self-correcting influence for the class and, to the extent that their influence is generated outward, to society.

4. The learner's reactions to the educational environment should be respected and accepted. Children have had the same rewards bestowed upon them for various behaviors in the past; they, therefore, bring to the learning situation a variety of responses designed to attain similar goals. Acceptance of the learner's reactions in no way implies that the teacher is not to help him change and improve his repertoire of responses.

5. The learner should be allowed to extract social rewards from his peer group. Instituting social ostracism of an offender is not acceptable practice. The learner who knows he has support in some social reward can risk trying new solutions and repelling ready-made ones.

6. The learner should not receive constant praise from the teacher. As Berelson and Steiner noted, the more approval an individual gets, the more likely he is to receive some disapproval (1964, p. 144). This disapproval would come from his peer group and deprive him of acceptance and status. The lack of constant praise does not diminish the strength of a desired re-

sponse. Responses last longer when they are not reinforced continuously.

7. The learner should work in small groups. He learns to adjust his behavior to the expectations of others, thereby causing social controls to become self-control. Kluckhohn and Murray pointed out that if society is to function well, the members have to want to act in the way it is necessary for them to act, with inner compulsion replacing outer force (1948, p. 18).

a. All work should not be individualized. The inability of the learner to tell what the expectations of others are will thwart him in his attempts to gain acceptance, approval, and status.

b. Pupils should not always be allowed to choose their associates in small groups. Interaction with new associates will be the basis for forming new friendships. If the interaction is unpleasant, a limitation should be imposed upon the degree to which it occurs. Festinger and Kelley demonstrated that liking is inversely related to the frequency of interaction when the interaction is unpleasant (1951, p. 83). However, some conflict may achieve creativity and more development of the undefined potential.

c. If two or more learners experience unpleasant interaction while planning a social studies project, they should be separated and combined in another activity, such as ball playing. Bales and Strodtbeck indicated that positive and negative reactions to others were influenced by the particular activity phase in which the group is engaged (1951, p. 496).

d. Leaders of the groups should be peer-selected at times and teacher-selected at times. Peer-selection may tend to produce the same pupils as leaders each time. Having the same leader will mean greater conformity. Homans stated that the higher the rank of a group member, the more his activities would conform to the norms of the group (1950, p. 141). Teacher-selection of leaders carries the possibility of group expulsion of the selected pupils. A positionally marginal member of the group could be expelled completely if he is appointed to a leadership position. Also, he may be so intent upon retaining his position or upon achieving fuller acceptance that he has not the necessary time and security to attempt creative ideas and projects.

8. The teacher should be a participatory leader rather than a supervisory one when the

class is concerned with values. Cartwright reported Preston and Heintz's demonstration of greater change of opinions in discussion groups operating with participatory leadership (1961, p. 702).

9. The teacher should aid each learner in achieving group membership. The human animal requires social relationships. The learner who develops a potentiality that will cause expulsion from all groups should be helped to rechannel his energies into more acceptable behaviors.

Social rewards are essential to all children by the time they are old enough to attend school. Teaching does not allow the debate of whether to provide social rewards or not. Teaching exists for the purpose of helping each learner develop his optimum potential. This he can do in a secure environment that does not make the price of failing too high. Social rewards make the environment more secure and stable. Such rewards are only one variable—but a very important one—that the teacher can manipulate to maximize the development of his learners.

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