

LEARNING OUR DIFFERENCE

Some variability is unmeasurable

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FOR teachers, much of what is said about "individual differences" seems to have more to do with the sameness of learners than with differences. Means, norms, standard scores and all seem to lump learners together rather than treat them as unique. This is only partly because teachers do not understand the science of measurement.

In their communications, measurers themselves often have not carefully separated their measurements from the variables being measured. They have allowed teachers to develop rigid interpretations of measurements as though they were "real"—for instance, teachers have been allowed to think children "have" IQ's. And teachers have even been urged to use statistics about groups as though they were data about individuals.

Learning Assumptions About Human Behavior

In order to escape this paradox, it is important that teachers reexamine what human difference really is. It is essential that teachers do this task for themselves.

In our living experiences there is pervasive feedback for each of us which tells us that all human beings are different. We know vaguely that we are all a part of each other, but we know indeed that each of us is unique. The same living experiences which teach each of us the universality of differences, also teach us to deal with unique others by making assumptions about them. These assumptions are part of each self's concept about what the world is like and the people in it. Such assumptions are part of the private "reality" each of us has devised.

Having developed a basic set of assumptions, the educated human being can expand his assumptions through continuing evaluation of experience. The continuing evaluation will involve collecting data, some of which is quantified, and testing new feedback against previous learnings. Under some circumstances, such as therapy or trauma, changes can push into the basic set of assumptions, but for each of us there is a core of "knowledge" about human behavior almost not available to evaluation but which affects evaluation be-

cause it influences all criteria, values and motivation.

Since all learning involves evaluation, and since evaluation springs from an individual's assumptions about humanness, all learning involves significant elements unique and unmeasurable. Traditionally school procedures have left to chance the development of these basic assumptions about humanness. Learners were not helped to evaluate anything so personal, so intrinsic to the self. At best, students were *told* what assumptions to have.

Now educators are recognizing that if we facilitate the development of each learner's full potential we must not ignore the core from which we start with him. And slowly we are admitting that we cannot tell a learner what to value, by what to be motivated, by what criteria to judge, what is love, what is satisfying, what he needs. These he knows. They are part of his self.

Educators who particularly value the democratic processes and those who have investigated "mentally healthful" interpersonal relations have discovered that they tend to share assumptions about humanness. It is not surprising then to find that democratic processes are most effectively carried on through mentally healthful interactions. Nor is it surprising that mentally healthful ↔ democratic interactions between teachers and learners enable each learner to develop assumptions about humanness which, while unique, accept the potential of all men to move toward openness, autonomy, love and complete self-actualization.

Some assumptions about humanness which learners develop from mentally healthful ↔ democratic interactions

with teachers and peers are predictable. As has been described previously, the learner will recognize that all humans are different. From this he will realize that, whatever the differences of individuals, for each self the differences add up to infinite worth. The learner comes to know that behavior is explainable. He sees that each human chooses his own becoming and therefore each human is uniquely purposeful. As he finds that all humans are striving to be fully effective, he accepts all behavior as the behavior's attempt to be effective.

Teachers who have learned these same kinds of assumptions will put them together to understand that learning is a changed relationship among elements of the complicated process of the individual's becoming effective. From this definition of learning, teachers will move into the teacher-learner relation so as to help learners evaluate what are the consequences of their efforts to be effective. They will assume the validity of the learner's assumptions about effectiveness as humans, but they will help the learner evaluate even these assumptions if they become available to introspection.

Four Facets of Effectiveness

Again it can be predicted that, if the mentally healthful ↔ democratic interactions in a school are rich, varied, and deeply evaluated, each learner will develop along four facets of effectiveness. These have to do with loving ↔ lovable, coping ↔ capable, expressing ↔ meaningful, and integrating ↔ autonomous.

Each of these facets moves from experiencing the world, to a concept of what the world is like, to a concept of

how the self is related to the world, to a concept of what the self "should" be like, to a concept of what the self needs.

Loving ↔ Lovable

A human's first interaction with the world is through being cared for. Without care he would perish. From the quality of this care the infant learns about love—its plenty, its warmth, its sensuality, its limits, its demands. As he learns about being loved, he acts out what he is learning—by loving. Through loving and reactions to loving, he learns a concept of being lovable. The experiences of being loved, loving, and becoming lovable move through interactions with mother, father, siblings, peers, other adults.

The loving ↔ lovable syndrome is well developed by the time a child comes to school, but is certainly not finished. School activities and teachers contribute much to the concepts. Peers gradually become more influential than teachers, but helpful teachers contribute importantly to the evaluation of peer experiences.

In adolescence, each learner must review his concept of loving ↔ lovable and make decisions about how he will form his maturity around it. Fortunately, he can choose to learn to be different in loving and be lovable in ways other than he has ever known directly if teachers will help him. His loving will be observable to a large degree, but being lovable will be entirely private to his self-system.

Coping ↔ Capable

The second facet of effectiveness arises as each human tries to use the world. He learns what things can do to

him and what he can do to them. Gradually he learns what he can make things do to each other and how he is affected by this interaction. He learns to cope with the world as it is or to change it, to use the world and to be used by it only if and how he chooses. Then, through experiencing and evaluating his efforts to cope, he learns a concept of being capable.

Teachers know a great deal about helping learners develop coping skills. They are likely, however, to help improve the observable efforts at coping and leave to chance the private learning about being capable.

There are four general areas in which coping ↔ capable learnings develop. The first of these areas, perhaps each of the others to some extent depends on it, is *communication*. The learner experiences naming, defining, describing, discussing, listening, reading, writing, "appreciating." In addition he communicates through music, art, drama and dance. And, as he evaluates how these activities satisfy his needs, he learns a concept of being a communicator. It is this private concept which will determine what he does with his communication skills.

A second set of coping skills enables a learner to *live with people*. It must be remembered that for every skill about interacting with people the learner also develops a concept about his self as interactor. He alone knows how he defines being satisfied and capable and this determines what interactions he will attempt. It is convenient to group a third set of coping skills under a category dealing, not with people, but with the physical, chemical, biological, empirical world. We can

predict that coping with the world will bring some realization that phenomena are explainable, these explanations are discoverable, there are "laws," these laws are relatively "true," through these laws things become more useful. What the teacher cannot know about directly is the learner's private definition of being a capable user.

The fourth set of coping experiences in our classification are those dealing with quantifying and calculating. The learner must conceive of himself as being a quantifier, a calculator, a problem solver, one who uses numbers efficiently, one who can expedite relating to things and people by calculations, or else he will not engage in mathematical activities.

Expressing ↔ Meaningful

The third facet of effectiveness is the process through which a self's efforts to be expressed provide a concept of being meaningful. Of course, being meaningful comes out of being lovable and capable. These tell us *what* we are to start with, but each of us needs to go on to discover *who* we are. As we express, that is, make external in the world, what we are, we learn about a scheme of things. We come to "know" that there is a purpose for our purposefulness, there seems to be a reasoning about it all.

Our efforts to express our selves are observable. They are the things we make, create, build, own, our style of living—any procedure by which is put outside the self that which is valued, believed in, hoped for, in order to show it to others and/or to make it better known to the self. It would be foolish to assume that children or adolescents,

because their definition of being meaningful is still meager, are any less involved than adults are in building this concept. We assume that learners *must* express themselves. While they cannot be "assigned" to do so, they can be helped to recognize needs and to match needs with appropriate expressions.

Integrating ↔ Autonomous

By autonomy we mean a concept that the self is satisfyingly choosing its own becoming. It is a mentally healthy concept, but unfortunately not developed commonly. The basis of its development, however, comes from the need of each self to integrate all the self's needs. In other words, the self needs to resolve conflicts between needs—it is important not to need to go and to stay at the same time.

For children, experiences with choice making, standing alone, going one's own way, develop a concept more of independence than of autonomy. For adolescents, however, choice making *per se*, independence *per se*, rebellion, reevaluation, redecision, new directions are almost the essence of becoming. Integrating all his newly aroused needs and reevaluated self-concepts consumes the motivational power of the adolescent. From this cauldron he must deal directly with the concept of autonomy. All his definition of maturity goes into this concept.

Since the concept of autonomy is the most sophisticated facet of effectiveness it, more than others, continues to be developed throughout adulthood. Perhaps it is not surprising that few selves become autonomous. It is obvious, however, that the more teachers can be helpful in the evaluation of integrating

experiences the more they will contribute to the mentally healthy $\leftrightarrow$ democratic potential of the new generation of adults.

Unmeasurable Variability

The foregoing description of human effectiveness provides a base from which to reconsider the place of "measurement" in helping learners. Admitting that no measurement is "real"—only an approximation, a probability—we are adding the complication here that intrinsic learning, being unique, privy to a self, cannot be measured. Besides it becomes obvious that intrinsic learning is not quantifiable.

In the sense that each self is lovable with no strings attached, no matter how each self privately defines "lovable," then being lovable is infinite. There can be no more or less, only difference.

Much the same can be said for being capable. Each human is so able to do things, each puts together his abilities in such a complicated way! We can compare only isolated skills, never a total pattern of skills. That is, we can judge coping skill in a specific instance—typing speed, for example—but the capabilities of various typists to live effectively is another kind of guess entirely. And no matter what we guess, each typist has an entirely unique basis for guessing otherwise.

Who is meaningful? We all are. What is our meaning? It cannot be measured. Our meaning is not a matter of quantity—since I mean nothing without you, I cannot mean more than you.

It seems that we can talk about being almost autonomous, or about not being very autonomous. But, privately,

the self conceives its actions as choosing its own becoming or it does not. (This is complicated in discussion because we assume each human *does* choose his own becoming whether or not he has this self-concept.) Therefore, even if each person's autonomy were not privately defined, we still could not compare autonomies.

Then what can we measure? Obviously not any intrinsic learning. But we can use measurement very effectively for helping a student with the other side of the process of becoming effective. For instance, while "lovable" cannot be measured, we can observe acts of loving. By collecting and quantifying data about loving acts, we can increase the feedback to the learner about the consequences of loving acts. We can observe the learner's use of skills (coping), certainly see, hear, feel, his modes and products of expressing, and how some kinds of integration of needs are externalized. We can collect data about the experience side of becoming effective. We can count events, measure change in skills, determine criteria for skill performance, objectify data about attitudes through scaling procedures, inventory interests, test hypotheses, compute probabilities and so forth. Yet our purpose in this is *for feedback* to the learner. If we increase the feedback to the learner about the consequences of his efforts to be effective, then *he* will evaluate what the feedback means to him.

We may cease to *measure* some things and collect data about other qualities, but we will nevertheless need to know the probability that our data are reliable and/or valid. This kind of

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Students are also told that from time to time excerpts from the thought sheets will be read to the class anonymously. And the first week the teacher is careful to read a selection of them to illustrate the different forms and styles and kinds of topics that are possible. This is healthy stimulation to those students who wait cautiously to see if the teacher is kidding when he says that students are to write what is important to them.

Here are some excerpts from thought sheets written by fourth grade students:

"I feel frightened when I win a game sometimes. I don't know why. Would some people rather lose?"

"Here's a riddle. I'll tell you the answer next week. What's under the water but over land?"

"Why do we have to study arithmetic? I see no use for it."

"War
is not for fun
is not for happiness
is not for security
is not for anything I can think of
human."

A Final Word

Our concern with values must be clear by now.³ Essentially we see the *process* of valuing as holding the key. Children must learn this process if they are to learn to deal with the confusion and conflicts of our changing and very complex society. Thus, it seems of utmost importance to us that we encourage students to think about value related issues, to learn to find in them the path that is

³See *Values and Teaching* by Louis E. Rath, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney B. Simon (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, 1966) for an elaboration of the theory behind this approach and for many more examples of its use in the classroom.

most reasonable and most compatible with their growing sense of selfhood.

This does not mean that teachers must always conceal their own values and avoid arguing for them. But it does mean that moralizing and setting "good" examples are not enough. Children must learn to deal with the conflict choices that all too soon come tumbling down upon them. We hope that the examples in this article point to an approach that will help teachers who care about this problem. ☞

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quantification will build the effectiveness of teachers and learners the more it clearly increases the flow of feedback to learners.

In summary, the deep, pervasive, intrinsic learnings that are the very self-concept of the learner, are unique and private to the learner. They cannot be compared or quantified externally. Teachers can facilitate this learning by increasing the significance of the learner's experiences and the quality of his evaluations of experience.

Teachers will truly facilitate learning only when they accept that the learner chooses his own becoming. Each child, adolescent, adult, culturally disadvantaged, delinquent, neurotic, non-reader, or otherwise handicapped learner knows more about what he is doing than does the teacher. We cannot measure the learner. We can measure things external to him in order to increase the usefulness of data for his evaluations. ☞

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