

PSYCHOSYNTHESIS IN EDUCATION

It is axiomatic that prevention of any disorder is better than its cure. If the techniques of Psychosynthesis constitute effective therapy, as they do, how much better to prevent the need for later therapy by using psychosynthetic techniques in early education? What, we wonder, are the implications of this statement?

Examining the type of education prevalent in the United States today from the viewpoint of —first, producing a human being who functions harmoniously, radiantly and productively in relation to his own capacity, and

—second, establishing the conditions in which such an ideal could be realized,

we would first have to face such questions as the following, and to collect evidence to support the answers:

1. Is it certain that current educational procedures are effective?

For negative evidence, we have only to observe the state of society, statistics on crime, delinquency, suicide, and mental illness.

2. If we agree that something is wrong with the *quality* of our product—the presumably educated human being— what aspects of education today are evidently working to dis-integrate rather than synthesize the several components of personality as well as the several sectors of society?

The answer to this would involve a study of the constitution of the human being and then, if we accept the premises upon which psychosynthesis rests, a study of the processes of integration of the several conscious and unconscious elements of the human being.

3. Is it certain that more book-learning or more and better science courses would result in the development of a more stable and productive citizenry, capable of distinguishing between the *hows* and the *whys* of action? By what token have we assumed that the development of the rational "mind" was of more value to the process of maturation than the education of the feelings and emotions, and of the senses (direct perception)? How and where in the curriculum do we learn discrimination in the feeling-sensitivity area? Where is the evidence? Is it true that "too much criticism and analysis are apt to paralyze and even kill our emotions and feelings?" Wherein does a presently standard curriculum reach up to the Self and its integration with the other aspects of the personality?

These questions imply the challenge of a wider vision, and while it is impossible to outline a complete educational program here we can enumerate the main points which we consider necessary and appropriate:

I. Integrating Education.

This has two goals in view:

a. An harmonious and well-balanced development of all aspects of the human being: physical, emotional, imaginative, intellectual, ethical, social and intuitive.

b. The integration of these characteristics into an organic synthesis, into a "personality" which is Self-conscious.

II. Employment of Active Methods and Expressive Techniques.

Modern education aims at letting pupils have an active part in the processes of education. The pupil must be encouraged and guided to learn by doing. This activity on his part is twofold:

a. Action that aims at learning, as much as possible, through personal application of and experimentation with that which humanity has already achieved, both in the field of knowledge and in regard to the mastery of the forces of nature.

b. Creative manifestation of the pupil's own personality, of his own capacities and inner life, through the use of various expressive techniques such as dance, speech and drama, drawing and painting, modeling and sculpture, writing and the composition and performance of music.

III. Differentiated Education.

In consideration of the great diversities of human beings (independent of the differences of I.Q.), it is obvious that a good method of education should take this diversity into full account and should be individualized as far as possible. This means that, to really educate, one must apply different methods according to the special character, needs and problems of each pupil. The most marked and most easily

traceable diversities are those deriving from the different psychological types, but also to be considered are those diversities which derive from the special compound of physical and psychological elements which make a unique being out of each person.

The differential education is based upon two fundamentals which at first seem to be opposites, but which, in reality, can and should complement each other. The teacher should, after due recognition, adapt his methods to the psychological type to which each pupil belongs, while at the same time he must try to correct and even eliminate, as far as possible, the one-sidedness and shortcomings of each type, with the objective of attaining an harmonious synthesis of the personality.

Added to the typological diversities that are mostly due to the pupil's make-up, there are the diversities of a dynamic nature which express the different individual rhythms: rhythms in the development of the various capacities, and rhythms of learning and of action. These must be observed and taken into consideration.

IV. Physical Education.

The need of physical education to balance mental and imaginative activities is obvious, but a few hours per week of gymnastics or participation in strenuous competitive sports does not meet the true need of the child for rhythm and grace in physical action. The ideal, of schools in country surroundings (involving contact with Nature and its rhythms), is impossible for millions of city dwellers, but much can be done through integrating into every day life rhythmic gymnastics, dancing, and well-regulated games.

V. Education of the Intellect.

This should not be based on memorization—as unfortunately is still too often the case—but on the active training and the use of the mind. The pupils should not be asked to study and repeat, almost verbatim, the contents of text-books; instead, they should be taught to find out for themselves what they need to learn by the intelligent consultation of text-books, treatises, grammars, dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc.

Particular emphasis needs to be placed on the science which is most important to man: psychology. The pupils should be trained to develop, use, and control their minds through well graduated exercises of concentration, reflection, and meditation.

VI. Education of the Imagination and Feeling Nature.

Imagination is of great importance to human life, more than is generally recognized. It should receive particular attention. The training could include exercises of visualization, creative imagination, etc., so that the young people will gradually learn how to control and rightly use this function as a precious one but which, if not constructively applied, may become harmful and even dangerous.

The control and utilization of the emotional energies, and the development of a finer sensitivity, need to be adequately taught, realizing the important part they play in the formation of the personality. All the best methods should be used, both those transmitted by the wisdom of the centuries and those based on the latest developments of psychology. Here we can only briefly mention that every repression and unnecessary restriction will need to be carefully avoided, and the pupils taught how to transmute and sublimate their exuberant emotions and drives.

VII. Education of the Will.

This is the central and most precious function inherent in man, and yet it is the one that has been neglected most, both in family and school education. One can say that a widespread—even if unconscious—tendency exists to prevent or discourage the development of the will, despite the crying need for greater self-discipline. Oppressive and authoritative methods have proved utterly useless and have rather been one of the causes (though not the only one) of the rebellion against any discipline, so widespread among modern youth.

It is, therefore, a matter of urgency to encourage and help the young people to train and develop their will as a means of self-discipline, as well as a means of success in life. The methods for this purpose are available.

In reality, all the previously mentioned aspects of education—physical, mental, emotional, creative, etc—are indirectly exercises for the development of the will; but they could become more effective if

they were consciously used for that purpose also. In addition, there are other specific methods for the development of the different aspects or phases of the will: deliberation, decision, planning and action.

VIII. Spiritual Education.

Many children, especially gifted ones, show at a very early age an interest in philosophical, moral, and spiritual subjects.* They often possess real intuition and spiritual illumination. Typical, among others, is the case of the English poet Wordsworth, who added to the title of his famous poem "*Intimations of Immortality*" the subtitle "*Remembrances of Early Childhood*".

Children who at any age put such questions have a right to receive adequate answers. Their questions must be taken seriously; one can use such opportunities to instill into them a spiritual conception of life, make them feel the greatness and beauty of the universe and the admirable order that characterizes it—unmistakable sign that there is a Superior Being, the source of its meaning and purpose. From this general picture one may gradually proceed to giving them more detailed information, according to each one's own faith, but seeing to it that the feeling of wonder and mystery remains with the child. At the same time one must observe and encourage all spontaneous manifestations of a spiritual nature, such as higher aspirations, intuitions and illuminations, that might arise in the child.

Also, any parapsychological sensitivity they might demonstrate should never be denied or ridiculed, but should be explained to the pupil, so far as is possible, and be wisely watched and regulated.

But the chief aim of spiritual education is to help the pupil to realize that he, as well as every other human being, is in truth and essentially a Self, an inner Reality, and to make him understand and feel its dignity and value, showing to him all the consequences that derive from it.

IX. Education in Right Human Relations (interindividual psychosynthesis).

This important aspect of education is, in reality, part of the spiritual education, because to be spiritual does not mean only to be able to transcend the little self in a vertical direction through communion with God. It includes an horizontal attitude; that is, communion of thought and love, and harmonious collaboration with all fellow-creatures. This extension must be obtained by means of concentric circles, which gradually include ever larger groups, from the family to humanity as a whole. Therefore, education should aim at producing and establishing:

a. Right family relations. The family can be regarded as a human cell, almost as a small collective entity. Here the parents have a difficult and noble task, for which they are often unfortunately not prepared, and for which they need the help of competent educators. In any case, parents should have the wisdom demonstrated by birds, which make their young ones leave the nest when they have become able "to fly with their own wings".

b. Right relations with others of the same age. These are necessary in order that the development of the personality may take place in a normal and satisfactory manner. It is no less -rather even more -unnatural for a child to live all, or most, of the time with adults as it would be for adults of the age of thirty or so to live only with nonagenarians. Here we find one of the most difficult problems in the education of the gifted, and particularly of the highly gifted child (which will be dealt with in a separate brochure, *Psychosynthesis and the Gifted Child*.)

c. Right social and collective relations. These concern the many groups and communities with which an individual is or becomes connected, and cannot be considered in detail here. The general task of the educator in this respect is that of helping wisely and appropriately and of distributing the pupil's sense of "belonging" to each of the various groups. At the present time particular attention should be given to balancing the rightful feeling of national belonging and the natural love for one's country with the respect and the appreciation for all other peoples, and with the wider and higher realization of human brotherhood and world citizenship.

Where—and to what extent—are we preparing teachers to fulfill the demands of such a reoriented educational program as the foregoing suggests? If these goals be considered vital, then where are the teachers who understand the need, possess the skill in the techniques and thus stand ready to lead the way? Can we locate even a few of them? For surely they have always existed—a few of them here and there - these rare artist-teachers who reach, by some mysterious half-understood process, beyond the confines of subject-matter to the very core of personality to stimulate real growth in depth. Having found them, could we

not, by a study of their procedures, discover cues to deliberate, conscious action that would more effectively help to achieve the aim of all true education—integrated and full functioning human beings?

*Leta S. Hollingworth has observed that children, even at the age of six or seven, are interested in the problem of the origin and destiny of man, and ask for rational explanations of life and death. (*Children Above 180 I.Q.*, World Book, 1942, pp. 61-62)