

## Meaningful Education

**W**hat is the significance of education? Is education responsible if we fail or are successful in our development? Some psychologists assert this as an oversimplification. But education can be assigned only one-third of the success or failure. The other two-thirds come from our genetic make-up and our own contribution—how we manage what we have received through genes and education.

Although education accounts for only part of our development, the importance of a meaningful education cannot be denied. First, the influence of that one-third is important and, secondly, we live in a time when educators feel tremendously insecure. My suggestions here are to encourage educators to support well-developed young people in the development they have achieved and to enable troubled young people to reach their full potential.

Educational texts tell us that children need love; thus, that parents need to bring up their children with love. True enough, but children also need the capacity *to be* loved. Hence, parents should educate their children not only *with* love but *for* love. Here we proceed from the level of advising parents and teachers to help children and students to meet their needs, to the next-higher level in which youngsters are equipped with qualities that will help them in situations in which they are needed.

An example will illustrate the difference between the two levels. How, for instance, can brutality and excesses in football and other sports be prevented? How can spectators be protected from dangerous aggressive acts by fanatics? Many politicians and educators offer unruly children alternatives to gratify their needs—fan clubs, youth rallies, workshops... even their own small sports arenas in which they can abreact their excess energies in a supposedly “meaningful” manner.

What is overlooked is that meaningful abreacting is not possible. All abreacting is a discharge into “anywhere.” But “anywhere” is not a meaningful goal even if its target is a harmless surrogate. For example, if people quarrel with a friend, and then hurry home and slam the door rather than kick a dog, they have chosen a harmless target because the door does not feel the pain the dog would feel. But slamming doors is not a meaningful goal.

The model project has another flaw: Its only concern is gratifying an urge. Whatever our children and young adults need, the educators say, let them have it. And if they still don't develop normally and need something else—let them have that, too. By this method we never get beyond supplying their wants and needs; however, we don't educate them toward *being needed*. This, however, would meet their most profound need—the wish to be useful to others and the world.

Educator Eduard Spanger once said that the most fundamental difference in our world views is between drifting and feeling responsible. What he meant, no doubt, was that it is not enough to show young people in which direction they might drift without doing harm; they have to accept responsibility and learn to pick up the reins themselves—even against the pressures of drives and needs.

Responsibility means, for instance, after a quarrel with a friend to neither smash the door nor kick the dog (both of which have nothing to do with the quarrel) but to search for compromise and reconciliation.

Therefore, meaningful education will teach children two central guidelines: (a) aggressive urges must not be directed against others, least of all against the innocent and (b) not everything that's easy is permitted.

I start with these guidelines because there are two psychological views that have confused some educators.

## REPRESSION THEORY

The first view is *repression theory* (advanced by the followers of depth psychology), which states that all repressed aggression and frustration surface as neuroses or psychosomatic illnesses. This view leads to the conclusion that it is preferable to fight, curse, shout, and kick (regardless of the target), than to swallow anger, because “stuffing” anger will have pathologic consequences. Hence unruly soccer fans, who beat up people in the street if the “wrong” club has won, act “correctly” in this model of psychohygiene: They don’t swallow their anger.

Here is a case history of a patient that illustrates repression theory:

One of my patients had been plagued by diarrhea. Her physician first sent her to a psychotherapist, who explored her childhood to find the trauma that would explain everything. Indeed, he discovered that she, as a 6-year-old, had lost her beloved father. She said she was so close to her father that at the moment of his death in the hospital she, at home, sensed the crisis and broke out in tears. The therapist thereupon revealed to her that she must have felt massive anger against her father because he had deserted her. The repressed anger had caused her illness. He prescribed scream therapy: She should put herself back into her childhood and express her anger in screaming, thus “dissolving” the trauma. Six months of screaming did not help, and she sought my advice.

My first aim was to prevent a new trauma, this time in the dimension of the spirit, and not in the psyche—a misinterpretation of humanness. True humanness self-transcends and is not satisfied with self-actualization (with or without screaming). It searches for self-transcending values it wishes to serve, not merely for egocentric wishes on whose fulfillment it wants to *be* served.

I told the woman: “If as a child you really had such affection for your father, you felt at the moment of his death not that he *wanted* to desert you, but that fate tore him from you; that he *could not* be with you any