

Parents and Children: What is meant by Emotional Development?

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Quite a number of people are now beginning to realize that the question of emotional development lies somewhere near the real reason of the failure in education about which so many of us are troubled at this time, and also at the root, although not consciously, of the new experiments that are now being made.

First of all I want to define what I personally mean by the phrase 'emotional development', because no two people necessarily mean the same thing by any one psychological term. Let us therefore agree upon the meaning, which I am going to attach to the term. If you just say 'emotion', without any special thought about it (I have tried this with a number of people), I think you will find that there immediately leaps to your mind something like hate or fear, anger, jealousy, spite, love or joy, or something which is the emotion or reaction of one individual to other individuals. On the other hand, if you take the word 'emotion' as the technical psychologist speaks of it, you lose yourself at once in a mass of words and disagreement. I should like, however, to take it in a third sense, which is both technical and non-technical.

I would like to suggest that no-one can learn anything unless he wishes to do so. People who have been brought up in the severer form of educational discipline will say 'But think of the Latin vocabularies and French irregular verbs which we were made to learn against our wills at school!' It is quite true that we did ultimately succeed in learning these unpleasant things; but I suggest that when the child learns them there is a desire to master them, even if it is only to avoid the still more unpleasant consequences of not doing so. You can cram into a mind a certain number of actual facts, which will stay put for even three-quarters of a term in order to be turned out again at an examination; but I do not consider that that is learning. By learning I mean acquiring knowledge in such a way that the new facts are co-ordinated in the mind with those already assimilated, and illuminate the leading forward to others, which the child will learn in future.

This kind of learning cannot be acquired unless there is a drive of desire behind it. What then is this desire? I want to define it as the equivalent of emotion. It is my intention to talk about the wish life of the child, the kind of desires it has and the sort of things that it does about them, and I would suggest that in this question of the desire behind the activity of learning lies the whole secret of education. If you can make your child learn the particular thing that you wish it to know, it matters extra-ordinarily little how it learns it, provided that the material from which it can acquire knowledge is there. Nor does it matter whether you yourself are a teacher or not so long as you are

interested in this particular group of facts. Let us therefore consider that our aim as educationists is to understand from the one-day-old child upwards what are the factors, which produce learning.

By learning I mean not only the child's arithmetic or irregular verbs, but its capacity for managing its body well, its way of walking and talking, its capacity for playing games, its way of being interested in nature. This general total adaptation makes up the child's actual knowledge about the world in which it lives, and it is on this foundation that academic knowledge is finally built.

What are the emotions, which lie behind any successful education?

1. Curiosity

I would like to consider curiosity because it is, after all, the basic drive of all real work. The moment a mother says to me: 'Oh, my child isn't curious about anything', or the teacher says: 'No, she learns very well, but she isn't curious about anything', then I know for certain that the main channel of that child's activity has been blocked; for every baby comes into the world with a certain amount of energy which is distributed along certain channels, and a very large portion goes into curiosity. We know that the energy of a desire never dies: it does not matter what you do with it—you cannot kill it. If, then, you have a potent thing like curiosity it must remain somewhere. The child, as soon as it begins to move, is led by its curiosity to dart into every corner, to explore the coal box, to turn its mother's workbox inside out and to make of itself a complete nuisance. All this, from the child's point of view, is equally interesting, equally good material, and equally puzzling. But from the parent's point of view this crawling under one's feet makes a morning quite impossible. The usual result, therefore, is a severe prohibition.

Supposing this prohibition is strong, and the child sensitive, then it will have an extraordinarily repressive effect. The fountain of curious energy will persist bravely for some time, but if the prohibition goes on day after day, week after week, at the crawling age, something is bound to happen to the mind of this child. The force of curiosity may disappear into the depths of the mind, where it will go round and round, building phantasies which will lead the child in the period of adolescence into the ranks of the psychotic, with a very grave danger of ultimately tipping over into those of the insane. On the other hand, Curiosity may split into two, so that one part goes down and combines with the other impulses, while the other comes up in defiance. The child refuses to have anything so strong in him discouraged, and as a result you get the enfant terrible, whose 'Why, why, why?' is such a terrible nuisance to everybody. You do not help that type of child by merely answering its questions; but only by understanding what has happened. The child who seems to be one long question mark is one whose curiosity has been badly interfered with.

Certain of the things he has most wanted to know he has not been told, and therefore his curiosity sense has been over-developed and become a

revenge-instrument against the person who has refused to tell him what he wanted to know.

But supposing that, instead of being suppressed, the child has developed normally, and that the grown-up is helpful instead of condemnatory, then the child's curiosity may be deflected from its direct object—from an Object which is 'bad' to an object which is 'good. You welcome the desire and change its direction, and then the impulse will develop.

2. Desire for Power

Next in importance is the desire for power. Every small child is in the position of being pathetically helpless, and its helplessness enrages it. If you have ever seen a small child trying to attract attention and failing, you will remember its rage, the significance of which is that it produces a desire for control, a desire for power. This is accentuated by the child's natural helplessness, due to its size and lack of experience.

A great deal of impulse towards education is lost by perpetually drawing the attention of the child to its own powerlessness. If the child is to develop harmoniously in such a way that its energy is going to be free for education, there must be a development of the sense of power. How can this be done? The usual way is to put in the child's reach things over which it can exercise control. On the other hand, if the child is always told that it must be seen and not heard (not that this happens very frequently nowadays), if it is always in the company of people older than itself and therefore more knowledgeable, it becomes discouraged. The tremendous hunger for power disappears underground again and you get a child who is said to be lifeless and disinterested, but who actually spends the greater part of its time in phantasies of power. I would emphasize very strongly that though this desire for power disappears from sight, the child is not necessarily altered in the least. All that has been done is that the desire has been turned inwards.

3. An Interest in Sensuous Experience

Then we have the child's natural interest in its sensuous experiences. Every child is quite absorbed in what things feel like, in sucking the end of the bedpost, in putting things into its mouth, in discovering what is wet and what is dry, what is smooth and what is rough. A young child who is not vividly aware of his senses has usually some kind of very real underlying trouble. But in our civilization there is little opportunity for legitimate sensuous experience. The moment you find a child showing any interest in the sensations of its body you find also a heavy hand down on it with intense disapproval.

What can be done with this hunger for sensory experience, which is undoubtedly present, even though it is not evident? Any little child, who says 'I don't like getting my hands dirty', is not speaking the truth. It is not natural, but must be the product of a certain kind of education. I am not, however, pleading for the primitive states of man. I think it is just as bad, just as unworthy, to leave a sensuous desire in a primitive state, as it is to have a

child adding columns of arithmetic. We must discover first what are the emotions, and secondly how they can be effectively disciplined and developed, and not merely left alone and allowed to run riot.

Now sensory emotions are at present more or less undiscovered ground. They concern touch primarily, but not only manual touch. They concern the touch of the whole body, the feeling of wetness and dryness, of cold and of heat. They concern the muscle sense, which is a very live factor in every child: a small child wants nothing better than to run about and enjoy this sense. And here you come up against one of the great difficulties of class teaching. I know certain schools in which the child can move about all the time; but these unfortunately are exceptions. Usually children from the age of five onwards are expected to sit still, to deny themselves with violent effort this intense and real need for muscle sensation. The result is hooliganism and various forms of truculence. A child has just got to run about to get from his body the sensations, which the body is there to give. Out of this sensory experience comes a desire for smearing and moulding, the combination of the power sense and the sensory sense. Every child wants to experience the lovely sense of being powerful, of smearing on the white wall; to put its fingers into all types of stickiness. Here, of course, curiosity again enters, combined with the desire for power.

This is a legitimate pleasure, and it is the basis of the desire for writing—the desire to make marks on paper, the desire to use your sense of power over both the paper and the means with which to dirty it. These are the fundamental elements out of which an intense interest in writing springs. Thus the smearing sense, the desire to dirty things, is actually one of the founts of energy that educators may draw upon to understand the fundamental elements of the child's personality.

Moulding is another creative outlet. This interest starts originally in the child's own faeces. A perfectly healthy small child's faeces are entirely inoffensive in every way, and a lot of very small children would very much have liked at that age to smear with them, but this desire meets with such severe reprobation that it is almost instantaneously crushed, though it could be turned to a great many desirable ends. Every child enjoys intensely being allowed to imprint itself upon other substances. This is the basis of the pottery industry, carpentry, and a great many of the handwork arts.

4. A Desire for Destruction

The next factor is destruction, which has really two elements. The child does not want to destroy in our sense of the word. Either it wants to exert its power over objects by building up heaps of bricks, for instance, and then knocking them down; or it is curious and takes to pieces machines, watches and typewriters out of an intense desire to see how they are made, an impulse which, when disapproved of, dives underground and disappears so that you get once more the flabby child in whom you cannot arouse any spontaneous interest.

But destruction- having satisfied itself- nearly always turns to construction. It is only an unhealthy child who does not wish to construct something, though the things the child wishes to make often conflict with other peoples wishes. Take, for instance, grotesques which children love making, and which are actually an effort of construction. Unsympathetic disapproval of them is really wrong. Condemnatory disapproval will merely turn the constructive desire into constructing in phantasy instead of in good solid work. There are plenty of forms of disapproval, which will deflect instead of suppressing this constructive sense.

5. A Desire to be looked at

Most people have at some time or other wrestled with the exhibitionist child- the child in which this perfectly normal desire to be looked at has gone wrong- and either broken into truculence or become so exaggerated that the child feels it must take the centre of the stage. Everybody has this desire, but the degree varies enormously. It is not of any use suppressing it, because if one does so the child becomes more and more truculent and more and more difficult. The attitude to adopt is one of interest and inquiry. An exhibitionist child is usually the kind of child not good at its work, and has no scope for its energy along the customary lines. But the desire to be looked at can be one of the strongest desires of human nature and one of the most useful. It can be led through a healthy development as one of the driving forces of education.

6. A Desire for Buffoonery

In modern life, except for things like Micky Mouse and a few odd comedians here and there, real human buffoonery has dropped out of life. Children have a most gorgeous sense of buffoonery. It is one of their chief outlets, one of their ways of getting to know themselves, one of their ways of really wanting to be educated. After all, what is buffoonery? At the bottom of it is a very acute sense of relations, half-wit and half humour. Who are the good observers? The humourists. Who are the people who really see people? The cartoonists. Why? Because they have to see a face so well that they can make a cartoon of it. The tragedy is that this primitive and really very funny humour so often remains at the level of three and four years old. If you want your child to grow into a vivid and live personality, this capacity for seeing the funny side of places, names and gestures should be recognized as a most valuable one; and while I do not suggest that cartoons and limericks should go completely without censor, yet I think that if some outlet of the kind can be given, you will find that the child gains enormously from it.

If this desire for buffoonery is repressed, then two things happen. First, a general dulling of the whole perceptive apparatus occurs: the child ceases to notice, to be interested in faces and people and dresses. Secondly, you merely stunt its growth in early childhood. But if it is left to develop normally, it will form the foundation of a true sense of humour in later life.

In the complex state of our present civilization, a certain amount of adjustment has to be made by every child to the demands of everyday life. To

enable it to do this, its emotional life- its curiosity, desire for power. For sensory experience and admiration, for construction and destruction, and its natural instinct for buffoonery, must be allowed reasonable and adequate development

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