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THE CONTENT OF THE BEGINNING COURSE IN PSYCHOLOGY

EARLE E. EMME¹

Gordon W. Allport (1) in his recent volume on "Personality" makes it very clear that psychologists are at work upon many factors, conditions, and uniformity of events *related to* individuals; so that sometimes "science regards the individual as a mere bothersome accident" and is usually at work upon a "somewhat shadowy portrait." He goes on to point out that such psychological studies are not very satisfying when compared with the "living individual models" from which the data is taken. Thoroughgoing psychology cannot omit the individual at work with his intellect, motives, emotions, and his desires for personal security and efficiency.

The Sunday morning papers of this past week carried the story "Education of Quintuplets is Problem" because the girls are soon to be four years of age. Two possible views were mentioned. One was that the girls should continue to be educated by experts away from contact with other pupils, while the other possibility referred to the fact that the association with boys and girls while securing an education was tremendously important. What is involved in the two different positions? Isn't it simply this — *that a vital part of education is such an understanding of human nature that one acquires the disposition and ability to get along with others.*

Wickman (2), in his study of problem children, discovered that they were characterized by unsocialness, suspiciousness, sensitiveness, etc.

A few years ago a study was made of "Seven Hundred Maladjusted Teachers" (3) in the state of New York. The seven hundred is the number that were confined in state mental institutions over a period of years. It was discovered that these teachers had a striking lack of playmates (both boys and girls) during childhood, and similar conditions prevailed during high school.

Link (4) in his volume on "The Return to Religion" when speaking of "The Vice of Education" points out that our so-called educated people are poorly adjusted socially because they have not

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gotten away from a deep-seated form of introversion, thus living too largely apart from others.

Darley and Paterson (5) in a study of the employment status discovered that economic factors are important in accounting for unemployment. They continue: "*Personal factors* responsible for unemployment are found with greater frequency among the early unemployed than among the late unemployed. Among women, personal reasons play an even greater role. Contrary to popular opinion, technological change, although it increases in frequency as a cause of unemployment, is a relatively unimportant factor in these data."

Hepner (6), likewise, found the same trend related to personal relationships in his study of 1,000 business men. He discovered that these men had many common psychological problems of remembering, giving praise or rebuke, getting along with others, etc.

The above researches, therefore, point very definitely to the need for some understanding of Human Nature.

Let us now turn to the studies that have been made on this problem of the first Psychology Course. Dockeray and Valentine (7) made an analysis of the Elementary Psychology Course at Ohio State University and arrived at the following course objectives:

1. The acquisition of (a) facts and (b) principles of human behavior.
2. The practical application of psychological principles to the problems and contacts of daily life.
3. The acquisition of a technical vocabulary.
4. The acquisition of a skill in the application of scientific method to problems in human behavior.
5. The elimination of wide-spread superstitions and misconceptions regarding human behavior.

Items 1, 2, 5 seem very appropriate. No. 4 raises the question of how much scientific method is appropriate for the beginning course. Item 3 on a technical vocabulary is much more questionable.

Floyd L. Ruch (8) in his *Psychology and Life* accepted the view of loyalty to students' needs and interests.

1. 122 topics rated by 1,000 students at end of first course in psychology.
2. 100 non-psychologist college administrators rated degree of social value of information on a smaller sample of these 122.
3. 200 men and women who studied psychology 10 years ago rated the 122 topics for degree of utility.

At the very top of the interest scale came the following ten items:

(Ruch)

Understanding ones' own personality problems.

How to improve one's own personality.
 Human motivation.
 The applications of psychology to the training of children.
 The technique of reasoning out everyday problems.
 The problem of heredity vs. environment.
 The development of character.
 The psychological factors in crime and delinquency.
 An understanding of mental disorders and insanity.
 How to study effectively.

The following ten items are near the bottom of the scale of interest as judged by 1,000 students.

The methods of studying the learning of nonsense materials.
 How to train your pet dog or cat to do tricks.
 Maze learning in animals.
 Theories of audition.
 Wundt's theory of the feelings.
 Learning and thinking in rats and lower animals.
 How the blind read with their fingers.
 The anatomy of the sense organs.
 The methods and results of animal psychology for their own sake.
 The anatomy of the brain.

You will note that "How to Study Effectively" is in the first list of ten while near the bottom came "learning of nonsense syllables," "anatomy of sense organs," "anatomy of brain," etc.

A few other studies bearing on our present study reveal student needs and interests:

1. Katz and Allport (9) found personality, emotional, vocational, mental hygiene, social, health, and others having psychological attitudes as their foundation which need consideration in some course of a psychological nature.

2. Angell (10), in his *Psychology of Under-graduate Adjustment*, although his research techniques are less reliable, points in a similar direction as do Katz and Allport.

3. Emme (11) reported some of these adjustment situations in his study, (*The Adjustment Problems of College Freshmen*). In a total of 5,959 discovered adjustment problems that the freshman class actually made, the larger area frequencies resulted in the following order:

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Courses | 5. Parental |
| 2. Economic | 6. Advising (study procedure) |
| 3. Religion | 7. Vocational |
| 4. Social | 8. Library, etc. |

Williamson and Darley (12) and Strang (13), likewise, reveal many student needs and interests to which psychology is very definitely related.

Thus far we have indicated three things: First, several research

evidences that an understanding of human nature is very important in living a life in different relationships; Second, a brief presentation of two types of beginning courses in psychology; Third, several researches of university and college students reveal needs and interests which come nearer to the field of psychology than any other.

We now come to a *few determinants* of a Beginning Psychology course:

1. *Institutional Aims.* Reeves (14) and others in the Liberal Arts college give an interesting historical statement as well as one on recent status of institutional aims. A wide divergence is evident. A major conclusion is that course aims can not be set up until the institution has a clearly formulated policy. Teachers and Liberal Arts colleges would naturally set up different objectives from other schools.

2. *Number of students who never take more than Beginning Psychology.* An interesting study of the number of students who do not take more than 6 hours of psychology would be significant. The large number that never take more than 3 hours might be likewise surprising. The question then is, when will they get certain important data on "Understanding Human Nature and Certain Aspects of Personality?"

3. *The beginning course* should not be loaded with the responsibility of presenting concepts, viewpoints, working glossary of the field even if a student plans to make psychology his field of concentration for at best it can not be adequately done and a majority of students not planning on major are disinterested in such a procedure.

4. The beginning course should not be loaded with heavy physiology, detailed study of senses, statistics, animal behavior, etc.

5. Those students planning to be teachers, lawyers, ministers, or those interested in working with people should begin this study at the point of human nature.

6. All students need to know certain skills and procedures in human adjustment as well as an understanding of intelligence, motivation, emotion, and other equally significant topics.

RESULTING VIEWPOINT AND PERSPECTIVE

While a definition of education might seem to be out of place in a psychology discussion, it is very possible that psychologists would be much concerned over the present on-going experience of the individual as he relates himself to his world. Our definition is this: "The guidance of the individual in his present social relationships as an on-going experience, grounded in his antecedent past, but pointed toward his future adjustment, is a viewpoint gaining recognition in the philosophy of education." (15).

The assumption is here maintained that in the light of the preceding determinants the beginning psychology course should con-

tain considerable data that will be of personal value to the student in his current experience. Furthermore, a reminder of Allport's position in our initial statement that too much of our psychology has been a "somewhat shadowy portrait" about generalized individuals rather than living models, is important.

The following topics are presented more for the purpose of inciting specific discussion rather than the effort to approximate an ideal list; they are the result of four years' effort to discover from students in beginning psychology classes, and during the years from community groups, adult classes, psychological consulting, correspondence, etc., what people desire and need to know in the process of education and personal development.

It is hoped that frank and constructive valuation will be made of these 20 topics. Likewise, pertinent books, articles, researches, and other data will be suggested in order that personal enrichment for each student will be enhanced. (The writer will be pleased to make this material available for this coming fall use if desired.)

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

A First Course in Psychology

PART I. PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

1. *Understanding Human Nature*.....*A First Course in Psychology*
2. *The Quest for Certainty*.....*Quasi-Psychological Methods*
(People want to know; unreliable methods such as phrenology, clairvoyancy, character by handwriting, astrology, etc.)
3. *How Facts Are Secured*.....*Reliable Psychological Methods*
(Use of the clinic, tests, experimentation, attitude, interests, case studies.)
4. *Motivation*.....*Why Do People Do What They Do*
(The springs of action, body drives, urges, purposes, interests.)
5. *Other motive determiners*.....*Certain Compelling Factors*
(Habits, customs, traditions, ideals, friends — [The tread-mill].)
6. *Psycho-Physical Determinants*.....*Basic Organic Factors*
(Heredity, glands, nervous system, sensory organs, etc.)
7. *Emotion*.....*The Coloring and Zest of Life*
(How emotions give quality and intensity to life.)
8. *Emotional Education and Development*.....*Maturing Emotionally*
(Emotional conditioning, reactions, stabilization, how old are you, pitfalls of emotions, principles of maturing.)
9. *Intelligence*.....*Mental Ability*
(What is your intelligence rating, intelligence quotient, percentile rank, can intelligence rating be raised, relation of intelligence to High School records, to college grades, to success, to socio-economic status, to emotional-instability, related abilities, thinking, problem solving, how to concentrate, measurement of intelligence, tests, theories of intelligence, levels of intelligence.)
10. *Factors and Condition of Learning*.....*How We Learn*
(Study Habits, Wrenn Study Habits Inventory, acquisition, recognition, retention, reproduction; principles of unity, effect, association, distributed effort, interests, incentives, exercise, recency,

- growth, conditioned response, forgetting, interference, transfer of training.)
11. *Development During Childhood.....Where Children Live and Develop*
(Infant behavior — origins of child behavior — growth of physical, mental, and motor capacities — emotional behavior — social behavior — major interests —.)
 12. *Development during Adolescence.....How Adolescents live and Develop*
(Physical, mental, social, and religious changes — taboos, ceremonies — interests.)
 13. *Development during Adulthood.....What Adults Do and Feel*
(Where adults live — physical maturity — social and intellectual change — economic and vocational stability — disillusionments — and disappointments.)

PART II. HOW SOME PEOPLE ADJUST TO LIFE — WHAT THEY DESIRE —
WHAT THEY DO

14. *Withdrawing from Reality.....Some Are Determined or Inclined to Withdraw*
(Some people desire to live back in the good old days; some are introverted; others feel inferior, etc.)
15. *Distorting Reality.....Changing Conditions for Personal Convenience*
(Some distort life situations to suit their own purposes; some misrepresent some lie; others over-emphasize.)
16. *Compensation in Relation to Reality.....Some Try But Do Not Adjust to the Complete Situation*
(Some individuals make partial adjustment but with some misrepresentation. This includes the many who do something about trying situations, but do not carry through. Many types of compensations are explained.)

PART III. HOW TO IMPROVE PERSONALITY

17. *Personality is Achieved.....What People Strive For*
(People desire to be self-adequate and desire certain forms of social worth, status, and personal security, character, reputation.)
18. *Facing Reality.....(Principles of Healthy Personality Development) — The Way To Live Happily*
(The individual can make the most of his life by facing his total situation. Health, sincere purpose, vocational and educational efforts, religion, social adaptation, selection of a cause, etc., are important.)
19. *Facing Reality.....(Prin. of Healthy Personality Development) — The Way To Live Happily*
(Continued.)
20. *Conditions of Efficiency.....Personal Aids*
(Sleep — relaxation — recreation — work — exercise — drugs — noises — colors — disturbances.)

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