Some notes on Teaching.

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I.

Teaching and Psychology:

We make a great, very great mistake, if we think that psychology, being the science of the mind's laws, is something from which we can deduce definite programmes and schemes and methods of instruction for immediate schoolroom use. Psychology is a science, and teaching is an art; and sciences never generate arts directly out of themselves. To know psychology, therefore, is absolutely no guarantee that we shall be good teachers.

The extent of knowledge in psychology which is necessary to all teachers need not be great: for the great majority of us a general view is enough, provided it is a true one; and such a general view, one may say, might almost be written on the palm of one's hand.

Ingenuity in meeting and pursuing the pupil, that tact for the concrete situation, though they are the alpha and omega of the teacher's art, are things to which psychology cannot help us in the least.

But, if the use of psychological principles thus be negative rather than positive, it does not follow that it may not be a great use, all the same. It certainly narrows the path for experiments and trials. We know in advance, if we are in psychology, that certain methods will be wrong, so our psychology saves us from mistakes. It makes us, moreover, more clear as to what we are about. We gain confidence in respect to any method which we are using as soon as we believe that it has theory as well as practice.

The most general elements and workings of the mind are all that the teacher absolutely needs to be acquainted with for his purposes: that is what is aimed at in the following paragraphs.

II. The Stream of Consciousness

The most general fact of psychology is that in each of us, when awake and often when asleep, some kind of consciousness is always working. The second general fact is that the concrete fields are always complex .

1. The essential problem of psychology is though it is a prime fact there exists this stream of consciousness the nature and origin of the same is the main problem.

2. There is a stream, a succession of states, or waves, or fields (or whatever we please to call them), of knowledge, of feeling, of desire, of deliberation, etc., that constantly pass and repass, and that constitute our inner life.
3. The stream of consciousness has two functions

    1. it leads to knowledge

    2. it leads to action

While dealing with children we should note that the Child is a Behaving Organism

Man, whatever else he may be, is primarily a practical being, whose mind is given to him to aid in adapting him to this world's life.

III

Education and Behavior

Education is the organization of acquired habits of conduct and tendencies to behavior.

1. The teacher should note the absolute necessity of reactions of the child to various stimuli.

2. The teacher should note that there is no reception without reaction, no impression without correlative expression: “this is the great maxim which the teacher ought never to forget"

3. The reactions can be native or innate or acquired.

Under normal circumstances then, education means, in short, little more than a mass of possibilities of reaction, acquired at home, at school, or in the training of affairs.

4. Every acquired reaction is, as a rule, either a complication grafted on a native reaction, or a substitute for a native reaction which the same object originally tended to provoke.
5. Therefore the teacher's art consists in bringing about the substitution or complication; and success in the art presupposes a sympathetic acquaintance with the reactive tendencies natively there.

IV

Native Reactions are

1. Fear

2. Love

3. Curiosity - the impulse toward better cognition

4. Imitation

5. Emulation - the impulse to imitate what you see another doing, in order not to appear inferior ("A teacher should never try to make the pupils do a thing which she cannot do herself"; "The deepest spring of action in us is the sight of action in another.").

6. Ambition

7. Pugnacity

8. Pride.(It is the competitive spirit that is sought to be understood through impulse. The fighting impulse must often be appealed to enable a person learn)

9. Ownership -"in education, the instinct of ownership is fundamental".

10. Constructiveness

11. Other impulses - love of approbation, vanity, shyness, secretiveness.

The teacher should know that the law of transitoriness in instincts is a fundamental truth. Many of our impulsive tendencies ripen at a certain period and, if the appropriate objects are then and there provided, habits of conduct toward them are acquired which are lasting. But, if the objects are not forthcoming then, the impulse may die out before a habit is formed and later it may be hard to teach the child to react appropriately in those directions.

The observant teacher alone helps the child at the appropriate time and there are no specific rules that can be drawn in this regard.

A teacher must start with the native tendencies, and enlarge the pupil's entire passive and active experience. He must ply him with new objects and stimuli, and make him taste the fruits of his behavior, so that now that whole context of remembered experience is what shall determine his conduct when he gets the stimulus, and not the bare immediate impression.

V

The Laws of Habit

It is very important that teachers should realize the importance of habit, and psychology helps us greatly at this point.

"Habit is second nature, or rather ten times nature" is a saying that is worth remembering.

1. Ninety-nine hundredths or, possibly, nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of our activity is purely automatic and habitual, from our rising in the morning to our lying down each night.

2. It is wisely and widely held that we are mere bundles of habit; we are stereotyped creatures, imitators and copiers of our past selves.
3. Since habit, under any circumstances, is what we always tend to become, it follows first of all that the teacher's prime concern should be to ingrain into the pupil that assortment of habits that shall be most useful to him throughout life.
4. Education is for behavior, and habits are the stuff of which behavior consists.
5. We must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can, and as carefully guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous.
6. The more of the details of our daily life we can hand over to the effortless custody of automatism, the more our higher powers of mind will be set free for their own proper work.

Practical maxims about habit:

1. In the acquisition of a new habit, or the leaving off of an old one, we must take care to be as strong and decided an initiative as possible.

2. We should never allow an exception to occur till the new habit is securely rooted in life.

3. Seize the very first possible opportunity to act on every resolution that is made, and on every emotional prompting one may experience in the direction of the habits one aspires to gain.

VI

On Character formation:

Character is a completely fashioned will, and a Will is an aggregate of tendencies to act in a firm and prompt and definite way upon all the principal emergencies in life.

1. The teacher should not preach too much to pupils or abound in good talk in the abstract.

2. The teacher should help the pupils to keep the faculty of effort alive in them by a little gratuitous exercise by doing every day or two something for no other reason than its difficulty.

3. The importance of productive habit formation should be taught to the students. If it can be explained that they would after some time (years) be just mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state.

VII

The Association of Ideas

Most of our mental operations we can be explained when we have once grasped the principles of association in our thinking process. Sigmund Freud has revolutionized the sphere of understanding human behaviour by using this principle.

There are two fundamental laws of association:

1.The Law of Contiguity

2.The Law of Similarity

The entire routine of our memorized acquisitions is a consequence of nothing but the Law of Contiguity. The words of a poem, the formulas of trigonometry, the facts of history, the properties of material things, are all known to us as definite systems or groups of objects which cohere in an order. Any one part reminds us of the others.

A: Interest

Any object not interesting in itself may become interesting through becoming associated with an object in which an interest already exists. The two associated objects grow, as it were, together; the interesting portion sheds its quality over the whole; and thus things not interesting in their own right borrow an interest which becomes as real and as strong as that of any natively interesting thing.

An idea will infect another with its own emotional interest when they have become both associated together into any sort of a mental total.

The most natively interesting object to a child is its own personal self and its fortunes. We accordingly see that the moment a thing becomes connected with the fortunes of the self, it forthwith becomes an interesting thing.

VIII

Program for the teacher:

From all the above factors there emerges a very simple abstract program for the teacher to follow in keeping the attention of the child:

1. The teacher should begin with the line of the pupils native interests, and offer objects that have some immediate connection with these.

2. Next, step by step, connect with these first objects and experiences the later objects and ideas which the teacher wishes to instill. Associate the new with the old in some natural and telling way, so that the interest, being shed along from point to point, finally suffuses the entire system of objects of thought.

However it is obvious that it is in the fulfillment of the rule that the difficulty lies.

3. The difference between an interesting and a tedious teacher consists in little more than the inventiveness by which the one is able to mediate these associations and connections, and in the dullness in discovering such transitions which the other shows.

4. When the geography and English and history and arithmetic simultaneously make cross-references to one another, you get an interesting set of processes all along the line.

5.If we wish to insure the interest of our pupils, there is only one way to do it; and that is to make certain that they have something in their minds to attend with, when we begin to talk. That something can consist in nothing but a previous lot of ideas already interesting in themselves, and of such a nature that the incoming novel objects which we present can dovetail into them and form with them some kind of a logically associated or systematic whole.

B: Attention

When we were examining the subject of “interest” we were inevitably considering the problem of attention: for to say that an object is interesting is only another way of saying that it excites attention.

However we should explicitly note that, the more the passive attention is relied on, by keeping the material interesting; and the less the kind of attention requiring effort is appealed to; the more smoothly and pleasantly the classroom work goes on.

But when all is said and done, the fact remains that some teachers have a naturally inspiring presence and can make their exercises interesting, whilst others simply cannot. And frankly we can depend only on the deeper spring of human personality that can conduct the task.

The genius of the interesting teacher consists in sympathetic divination of the sort of material with which the pupil's mind is likely to be already spontaneously engaged, and in the ingenuity which discovers paths of connection from that material to the matters to be newly learned. The principle is easy to grasp, but the accomplishment is very difficult.

The teacher dealing with the topics that are highly abstract, has to show its nature by concrete examples; if it be unfamiliar, should make it figure as part of a story; if it be difficult, one has to couple its acquisition with some prospect of personal gain. Above all things the teacher has to make sure that it shall run through certain inner changes, since no unvarying object can possibly hold the mental field for long. Let the pupil wander from one aspect to another of the subject. If such a straying is not proper according to the teacher a variety of the same may be supplied. It should be noted that variety in unity is the secret of all interesting talk and thought.

C: Memory

Memory has to be educated. Memory depends on the principle of associations. An organized system of associations may be considered as memory. The goodness of the memory depends on

1. The persistency of the associations and
2. The number of such associations.

A very important factor that the teacher should remember is that there can be no improvement of the general or elementary faculty of memory.

There can only be improvement of our memory for special systems of associated things.

This latter improvement is due to the way in which the things in question are woven into association with each other in the mind.

Associations that are intricately or profoundly woven they are held or remembered.

The disconnected associations tend to drop out just in proportion as the native brain’s capacity of retentiveness. And the Creator has made this to be very poor.

We have noted in our daily life that most men have a good memory for facts connected with their own pursuits.

The Principle of Rationality is the most important to be remembered when we try to understand the nature of memory.

The rational system is the best possible sort of system in to which we can weave objects mentally.

Classification is the way where we place every thing in its pigeon-hole in a series.

While classifying we can explain the objects logically by its causes, and deduce from it its necessary effects and find out of what is its natural law.

Cramming seeks to stamp things in by intense application of the mind immediately. But a thing thus learned can form but few associations. On the other hand, the same thing recurring on different days, in different contexts, read, recited on, referred to again and again, related to other things and reviewed, gets well wrought into the mental structure. Thus a good teacher has to promote meaningful associations and this is well known. 2+2 = 4 is not as meaningful as 2 bananas + 2 bananas Equals 4 bananas.

We must remember that human beings are too complex for light to be thrown on his real efficiency by measuring any one mental faculty taken apart from its consensus in the working whole. Such an exercise as this, dealing with incoherent and insipid objects, with no logical connection with each other, or practical significance outside of the 'test,' is an exercise the like of which in real life we are hardly ever called upon to perform. In real life, our memory is always used in the service of some interest: we remember things which we care for or which are associated with things we care for.

In all primary school work the principle of multiple impressions has to be well recognized.

Memory and Thinking:

The art of remembering is the art of thinking. When we wish to understand a new thing in either our mind or in that of the pupils, our conscious effort should not be so much as to impress and retain it, as to connect it with something else already

there. The connecting act is called thinking. If we attend clearly to the connection, the connected thing will certainly remain within for recall.

The teacher should note that academic performance is no indicator of performance in real life. The teacher needs to be patient and sympathetic with the type of mind that cuts a poor figure in examinations. It may, in the long examination which life sets us, come out in the end in better shape than the student who replies immediately to all questions. It may be having passions much deeper, its purposes more worthy, its combining power less commonplace, and its total mental output consequently more important.

The Acquisition of Ideas

The process of education, taken in a large way, may be described as nothing but the process of acquiring ideas or conceptions, the best educated mind being the mind which has the largest stock of them, ready to meet the largest possible variety of the emergencies of life. In all this process of acquiring conceptions, a certain instinctive order is followed. There is a native tendency to assimilate certain kinds of conception at one age, and other kinds of conception at a later age. If we feed the growing human being with the sort of experience for which from year to year he shows a natural craving he will develop in adult life a sounder sort of mental tissue, even though he may seem to be 'wasting' a great deal of his growing time, in the eyes of those for whom the only channels of learning are books and verbally communicated information.

Apperception

Apperception "means nothing more than the act of taking a thing into the mind". Stated simply it means that every impression that comes in from without, be it a sentence which we hear, an object of vision, or a smell which assails our nose, no sooner enters our consciousness than it is drafted off in some determinate direction or other, making connection with the other materials already there, and finally producing what we call our reaction. The particular connections it strikes into are determined by our past experiences and the 'associations' of the present sort of impression with them. The product is a sort of fusion of the new with the old, in which it is often impossible to distinguish the share of the two factors.

The law of Economy:

In admitting a new body of experience, we instinctively seek to disturb as little as possible our pre-existing stock of ideas. We always try to name a new experience in some way which will assimilate it to what we already know. We hate anything absolutely new, anything without any name, and for which a new name must be forged. So we take the nearest name, even though it is inappropriate. This factor is both the advantage and disadvantage of economy.

In later life a new idea or a fact which would entail extensive rearrangement of the previous system of beliefs is always ignored or extruded from the mind in case it can not be sophistically reinterpreted so as to tally harmoniously with the system.

This economical tendency to leave the old undisturbed leads to what is known as 'old fogyism' but there are young fogies, too. Old fogyism begins at a younger age than we think. It is held by most psychologists that the young fogies start developing by the middle of twenties.

It is necessary to note that an educated man is a group of organized tendencies to conduct or behave. In every case the man's conception of the way in which to name and classify the actual fact is what prompts the conduct according to the situation. The more adequate the stock of ideas, the more 'able' is the man; the more uniformly appropriate is his behavior likely to be.

The essential preliminary to every decision is the finding of the right names under which to class the proposed alternatives of behaviour or conduct. He who has few names is in fact an incompetent deliberator. It is obvious that each and every name stands for a conception or idea. They are our instruments for handling our problems.

It is commonly agreed that education that is essentially institutionalized should be completed early and since the conceptions acquired before thirty remain usually the only ones we ever gain it is stressed that 30 years may be fixed as the upper age limit for any institutionalized education.

The Will

When there is more than one alternative for the person to choose to conduct himself he needs to firm up his priorities. This is done by the faculty called Will. It becomes difficult to form a will when there are a number of conflicting systems of ideas. That there are several layers of consciousness in which one lives makes it almost very hard to form a firm will if the choice depends on the complex field of consciousness under play.

The interesting thing to note is the extreme delicacy of the inhibitive machinery. A strong and urgent motor idea in the focus may be neutralized and made inoperative by the presence of the very faintest contradictory idea in the margin.

For Ex:- the pupil wants to go out either to the bath room or out of the class just for the fun of it but he will either postpone or abandon the idea based on what he perceives that to be in the eyes of the peer group or even the teacher.

Thus the voluntary actions of the pupils are at all times a resultant of the compounding of their impulsions with their inhibitions.

The teachers general duty although is to generate in the pupils a large stock of ideas, any one of which may be inhibitory, yet they must also see to it that no habitual hesitancy or paralysis of the will ensues, and that the pupil still retains his power of vigorous action.

Psychology can state your problem in these terms but the teacher should know that the psychologist is impotent to furnish the elements of the practical solution to the problem. All things said and the best efforts of the teacher is put in, it is a bare truth that the result will depend more on a certain native capacity and temper in the pupil's constitution than any thing else.

The teachers task is essentially to build up a character in the pupils; and a character, as stated earlier consists in an organized set of habits of reaction. As pointed earlier the pupil's native strength alone matters finally. The native capacity of the pupils vary in the animal and human resources or potentials for action in these areas. But the Kind Creator has provided the same capacity to love, be kind, be generous, be forgiving, share and co-operate and such divine potential for all. The teachers have to work on these also very carefully building these values into their classes and exercises.

As our volitional habits (habits that are formed because of our will) depend, first on what the stock of ideas which we have; and, second, on the habitual coupling of the several ideas with action or inaction respectively. The awareness of these factors places a heavy responsibility on the teachers to

1. generate holistic ideas in the pupils and
2. generate games and lessons that help habitual coupling of these idea.

For Ex:- The idea of a good person has to be associated with the idea of forgivingness. The idea of any thing good is to be understood from the angle of the general good it does rather than the individual advantage. Etc.,

In the development of the Divine Resource there is a need to be clear about what is right conception. In what does a moral act consist? It consists in the effort of attention by which we hold fast to an idea which but for that effort of attention would be driven out of the mind by the other psychological tendencies that are there. The importance of rational thinking therefore gets understood here, that is in the process of development of Firm Will even as it was the secret of memory. Thinking thus is the kingly thing in man as it is the basis for Memory and also the development of Will. We all know agree on the fact that some persons have special memory. Master Sri Ramchandraji Maharaj of Shahjahanpur says that we can also have Special Will. Such a will is one where the concept of failure or negativity is not there. Napoleon said there is nothing like "impossible" in my dictionary. If he can say so, so can we.

Thus are the pupils should be

1. Served first, by the stock of ideas with which the teachers furnish them.
2. second, the teachers furnish them by the amount of voluntary attention that they can exert in holding to the right ones, however, unpalatable and
3. thirdly by the several habits of acting definitely on these latter to which they have been successfully trained.

It should be borne in our mind that our acts of voluntary attention, brief and fitful as they are, are nevertheless momentous and critical in determining us, to higher or lower destinies. Therefore the teachers should keeping in view the future of the children who are the builders of the future generations assiduously work on these principles. The exercise of voluntary attention in the schoolroom must therefore be counted one of the most important points of training that take place there.

The first-rate teacher, by the keenness of the remoter interests which he is able to awaken, will provide abundant opportunities for its occurrence.

The greatest spiritual value is Freedom. Freedom from wants is the field of economics with which educational system got involved and on fair examination one needs to say disproportionately. Freedom from desires and wants itself is the greater freedom of the spirit about which very noble souls have exhorted human beings from times immemorial. However this task has been undertaken on the low key by the educators and teachers. Considering the inner fitness of things, one would rather think that the very first act of a will endowed with freedom should be to sustain the belief in the freedom itself. The teacher has enormous preliminary and preparatory role in this regard.

It is better for the teachers to apperceive their pupils as a little sensitive, impulsive, associative, and reactive organism, partly fated and partly free, will lead to a better intelligence of all his ways. Understand them not as a subtle little piece of machinery (as the medical, physiology etc. scientists ask us): but try to see them as Divine Beings spreading the message of love and seekers of Freedom and love them as well. Then such teachers can consider themselves perfect.