

INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PEDAGOGY

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Alfred Adler's saying, "anybody can learn anything," is the new guiding principle in pedagogy. That sentence, with all its typically Adlerian simplicity, means nothing less than the revolutionary concept that a person's abilities and skills, like his character traits, develop from his activity in the respective fields (called "training"), and that the results do not depend upon innate predispositions. In other words, a person's faculty for developing a particular skill (called "talent") is the effect rather than the cause of his training in that field.

Consequently - and contrary to the traditional idea - we neither will credit a student's success to his natural endowment, nor consider lack of such an endowment as the source of a student's failure. From our view, the responsibility for a student's rate of progress falls on the shoulders of both the teacher and the student: the teacher is fully responsible for the suggestions and stimulations he contributes; the student is responsible for his cooperation.

In order to verify the foregoing hypothesis, the development of the actual "talent" must first be traced. This research must be adapted to each particular field, and the specific findings will be different in every field. Yet all the fields of talent very likely have in common some basic principles.

To begin with, a mental skill, as complex as it appears to be, nonetheless is a total unit and develops as a unit, similar to the growth of an organism. For every organic process is based upon the universal axiom - also a fundamental axiom of Individual Psychology - that the whole and its aim is prior to its parts. Thus, a method of instruction and study can be generally effective only if it follows that axiom and helps the student develop his skill as a whole.

A typical example of an instruction which disregards that axiom is the formerly used method of teaching a foreign language. The student had to approach the language from its partial problems. He had to memorize words, sentences, and poems. He had to learn grammatical rules. He had to translate and retranslate. In this way he could acquire a purely theoretical or analytical knowledge of the language, but did not attain real command of it as over his mother tongue. Modern teaching methods achieve far better results by following the natural way a child develops his understanding and use of language as a whole, namely by conversation, reading, and writing.

Another example: conventional methods of music instruction are derived from the analysis of the fully developed skill in mastering a musical instrument. The student is held to work on musical compositions

individually, to divide each of them into sections and fractions, to study each of them separately, and then to piece them together. Furthermore, he is confronted with the various partial techniques required, such as rhythm, dynamics, phrasing, finger movements, speed, etc. He is expected to cope with all these isolated tasks by particular exercises and drills, detached from living music. And he is expected to apply the skill, acquired by those drills, to the tasks of real music.

Such a "mechanistic" method has no constructive effect. It does not help the "untalented," while the "talented" can do without it. The latter tackle each piece of music in its continuity, nor do they stick to the individual pieces, but work on a practically unlimited volume of music. A "talented" pupil starts working on the instrument by himself, and maintains his way of working after beginning formal lessons.

Exactly the same way of developing the mastery of the instrument as a whole can be followed by formal instruction. Such a method - we might call it an "organic method" - implies a complete departure from the conventional "mechanistic" approach and expedient. In contrast to the "mechanistic" method, an "organic" method confronts the student with the main difficulties at the beginning, and the most important task of the "organic" method is to offer particular guidance to the beginner for helping him to get over his initial difficulties.

In observing response to that guidance, we will meet four types of students:

a) Some who respond easily and quickly, but do not even depend upon the guidance. Those are the "talented" under all circumstances.

b) Some follow likewise immediately and successfully, but they do depend upon the teacher's guidance. These are persons who fail with the conventional teaching methods, but make headway with the "organic" method.

c) Some students have considerable initial difficulties in following the "organic" method, but overcome them gradually. They progress slowly, yet steadily. Those are persons who have failed to develop certain basic abilities, yet compensate by following the instruction.

d) Finally, there are students who do not respond to the teacher's guidance and fail to cooperate with him. They are interested solely in the result of their studies, but lack the necessary working discipline to attain it.

These "problem pupils" offer the clue to the seemingly "natural" talent: it is basically "working discipline." A person is "talented" who not merely loves the subject but also the challenge of working to master it. Such a person cooperates with a teacher who gives him challenging assignments. He has a great deal of initiative which he likes to expend in trial and error. He is not discouraged by occasional failures, and he works toward ultimate success.

A person's attitude toward his work is an integral part of his character as Adler has shown. Yet he also pointed out that character traits are not rigid qualities and that everybody has at any time a chance to readjust himself to all the tasks of life, one of which is work.

In dealing with a "problem pupil" the teacher has the task of understanding his student's personality and readjusting him to work. He

has to win his cooperation and to improve his working discipline by offering him adequate help and encouragement. The art of teaching is not merely the art of using a perfect pedagogical method, but far more the art of dealing with a human being. The teacher's hardest task is to have his student accept his guidance. This art can best be learned by Adler's Individual Psychology. The teacher who applies this art no longer will seek "innate talent," and the idea of a "hopeless student" will cease to exist.