

## **How People Learn at Different Levels of Existence: A Radical Challenge for Educators**

Psychologist Graves suggests that people in educational systems should be grouped according to their level of existence, and each group educated in a way that is congruent with its members' level of existence.

He comes to that conclusion through his analysis of how people learn at different levels of existence:

**A-N State:** At this level, an individual is motivated only by stimuli which affect his imperative physiological needs. He adapts through a process of habituation or accustomization. Learning, in the sense of change in subsequent activation patterns which are relatively permanent, does not take place at this level.

**B-O Level:** At this second level, the neurological system is activated by changes, particularly sudden changes, in the mode or intensity of the stimuli associated with one of man's innate reflexive networks. Learning occurs only when there is a temporal overlap between innate reflexive states and the appearance of a concurrent stimulus condition; that is, learning takes place through the classical conditioning method (best known through the work of Russian psychologist Ivan Pavlov).

**C-P Level:** Here man is activated to learn by stimuli that can be used to satisfy specific need states such as hunger, thirst, and sex. The means to this kind of learning is operant conditioning or the 'trial-and-error learning method; that is, a person learns by making movements which shortly after being made bring about tensional release from the specific drive state. Learning takes place best when much activity is spent getting to the reward, the reward is presented soon after the act is performed, and the need state is very strong. For example, a C-P personality can best learn to spell 10 words if (1) he spends a lot of time at the task, (2) he gets a candy bar or other food as soon as he has succeeded in learning how to spell the words, and (3) he is very hungry. The C-P personality is egocentric, impulsive and hedonistic. For him the best answer to any problem is the one that brings him immediate pleasure regardless of what happens to anyone else.

**D-Q Level:** People at the fourth level of existence contrast sharply with those at the C-P level because they learn best through punishment rather than reward. At the D-Q level, a person is extremely sensitive to punishment and is motivated, above all else, to avoid aversive stimulation. In other words, D-Q people learn best when they are punished for doing the wrong thing.

"Punishment is a method one should never use if he wants effective, constructive learning from the impulsive, anger-prone, immediate reward-seeking person centralized in the C-P system," Graves warns. "To use the punitive methodology with the C-P is to invite uncontrolled, destructive acts upon the promoter of, or the instruments of, the learning system. But, when the D-Q way of thinking is dominant in man, the most effective means to achieve desired learning is through punitive, aversive stimulation. For some reason related to the presence of an excess of adrenaline in the system, a person centralized in the D-Q state is particularly attuned to aversive stimulation. Learning is accomplished best by getting him to avoid that which will lead to punishment."

In the D-Q state, says Graves, no punishment seems to mean no learning, while too much punishment produces rigid patterns that are very difficult to change, and the wrong punishment seems to leave the person unaffected or to produce negative, hostile learning. For the rigid, authoritarian D-Q personality, learning means spewing back black-or-white answers.

***E-R Level:*** At this fifth ['fourth' in text] level, man again learns in an active manner but not in the aggressive, immediate reward, no-punishment fashion as he does at the C-P level. At the E-R level, the major motivating factors include a challenging ideational content and the degree to which the outcomes meet the person's expectations.

At this level, man can wait for delayed reward if the learning activity is under his own control and is replete with perceptual novelty. Learning at the E-R level does not have to be tied to a specific need state nor is it dependent on immediate reward. The keystones are (1) the opportunity to learn through his own efforts, (2) the presence of mild risk, and (3) much variety in the learning experience.

***F-S Level:*** At the sixth or F-S level, an individual acquires new knowledge and potential behavior best through observation, without any direct external reinforcement for his own acts or without even engaging in the behavior he observes. This learning occurs when people watch how others respond to events in the environment or to symbols such as words and pictures. That is, F-S man learns by watching what happens when other people behave one way or another.

***G-T and H-U Levels:*** Graves is not yet certain how people learn best at these levels.

### **Different Educational Systems Are Needed**

Since people learn in different ways, Graves maintains that educators must develop separate learning systems for people at different levels of existence.

At the D-Q level, a person thinks in terms of absolute right and absolute wrong, and for this type of person the rigid, authoritarian, highly moralistic style of many traditional schools, emphasizing memorizing and spewing back material, may be appropriate.

People at the E-R level introduce situationalism and relativism into their way of thinking. To them there may be many answers to a problem, but there is one *best* answer. They want to comprehend in an impersonal, objective, distant, rational manner. They see learning as a game which has precise rules which, if mastered, will enable them to win the game. They think in terms of analysis, breaking things into their parts, and they prefer to add up their own conception of the parts.

People who think in an F-S way are unhappy over the absence of personal relevance in any abstractions that are a part of learning. They think in terms of sensing and apprehending rather than in terms of comprehending. They tend to refuse to deal with anything that analyzes or breaks down a learning experience.

For people at the G-T level, knowledge exists in specific settings. The settings differ and so do the knowers. Several interpretations of any phenomenon are always legitimate, depending on the person, his point of view, and his purpose. For students at the G-T level, a teacher's job

is to pose problems, help provide ways to see them, but leave to each person the decision of which answers to accept.

The theory of levels goes a long way toward explaining some of the problems currently faced by education, says Graves. In the United States, for example, the concept of education derives primarily from the limiting point of view of people who think only in a righteously moralistic (D-Q level) or technologically objectivistic fashion (E-R). This restricts education to only two of the major forms of human behavior known to exist.

In the righteous, absolutistic D-Q framework, there is a right and wrong in everything. There is absolute right in what education should be and absolute right as to how it should be carried out. Any other approach to education is an erroneous frill. From this viewpoint, the purposed of education is to inculcate the students with the right way to think, act, and believe.

In the technological or E-R viewpoint, education should strive to make the student think in an objectivistic, positivistic, rational, reasoning way. The goal of education is for the student to have hard facts at his fingertips and be able to reach cold, reasoned conclusions.

From Graves's viewpoint, however, the aim of education should be as follows:

- (1) To take the open student from thinking levels of lower complexity through successive stages to thinking levels of higher complexity.
- (2) To provide the closed student with that increase in his knowledge and skills with which he can be comfortable and survive and live better as a human being.

A school or university should have a means of ascertaining the level of thinking complexity of each matriculating student, says Graves. The administrators should then determine whether the student is just entering this form of thinking, consolidating it, or is ready to move on to the next possible way of thinking. If he is just entering the level, he should be grouped with students who are also entering the same system so as to firm up his newly found way of thinking. Open-minded students should be placed in an instructional situation with a teacher who is confronting the same conceptual problems the students are confronted with. Closed students should be grouped with similarly closed fellow students and be instructed by a teacher who is knowledgeable in the complexities of that particular way of living.

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