

THE ETHICS OF SUGGESTION IN PEDAGOGY.

Delivered February 13 at Jackson, Mo., at the Forward Movement Teachers' Meeting by Rev. A. T. Osbron.

(Requested for publication by a unanimous vote of the Association.)
Mr. President and members of the teachers' Forward Movement association of Cape Girardeau county:

I count myself happy to be so honored by your body as to be called upon for an address. I gather much inspiration from association with a company of persons, characterized by such brightness of intellect and loftiness of purpose.

I rejoice that the science of pedagogy has already passed the mere professional idea. Most of you realize that yours is not simply a profession, but a noble and high calling. Your influence upon the destiny of our boys and girls, is being felt in every department of life. Within your keeping has been placed marvelous possibilities. You hold the future destiny of church and state in your hands. Your responsibility is great, perhaps much greater than some of you suppose.

You have charge of the nation at the formative period. Never in after years are impressions so easily made, or so lasting. You are helmsmen at the wheel, and with a steady eye and strong arm you should guide the course of these frail barks, committed to your care, safely by the shoals, and through the storms into the haven of usefulness and success.

The teacher of to-day must not only be able to pass an approved examination on the branches of an English education, but to appreciate, and to be able to meet the possibilities of his calling, he must be conversant with the laws of mental science. Teaching is a process of "suggestionizing," and no man can properly teach until he understands the mental faculties, and knows how to make lasting impressions thereupon.

I desire this morning to draw aside the curtain and assist you to a broader vision, and a more exalted conception of the dignity of your position. Why should you, as a great many do, make teaching a stepping stone to so called higher things?

I. Please study with me in the first place the subjective or subconscious mind.

The subjective mind is that one with which we dream; that mind which never sleeps. To this mind all things are possible. Nothing seems out of the ordinary, or out of proportion. In our dreams what we see is not influenced by relative qualities, as in our wakeful hours, but we receive each impression without criticism or thought. We are not surprised to find ourselves independent of the laws of gravitation. We pass with the rapidity of thought through the air with no feeling of wonder. That which to the objective mind would seem unthinkable, is accepted by the subjective without question. I have a few times officiated at my own funeral, and once was the chief mourner.

This subjective mind explains the mysteries of intuition. Upon this mind impressions are more easily made, hence an opinion of our fellow man is formed if we but meet him on the street. Children and women reach such conclusions more readily than men. The child has not yet learned the art of criticism, in short, he has not learned to depend upon the objective or conscious mind for his conclusions. It is a fact known to all that a little child recognizes at once the person who loves children, also the one who does not. Our mothers and sisters do not act from a sense of reason or judgment but by intuition, and it has been demonstrated that they are usually more correct in their conclusions than are we men. If you ask them for a reason for their opinion they universally say "because." "I think him so, because I think him so."

"I do not like you Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this I know, and know full well,
I do not like you Dr. Fell."

It is through this mind conscience does its work, and becomes unto us the "still small voice," which when properly encouraged is unmistakable and authoritative.

To this subconscious mind God speaks directly. It was through this mind He committed the oracles of old to men, and through this mind He speaks directly to us to-day. This is the part of man made in the image of God, and when God speaks to this "inner man," however great the problems with which the conscious mind struggles, though it bend and break, within there is a calm, made perpetual by an abiding and unquestioning faith, a faith which "laughs at impossibilities and cries: It shall be done."

II. I wish in the second place to consider the susceptibility of this sub-conscious mind to suggestion.

A proper appreciation of this second consideration, will open up a new field to the philanthropist, the teacher and the preacher. And until you as teachers become conversant with its laws and are made to feel the immensity of its possibilities, you cannot know your responsibility.

I pause a moment to say that in this address I am not speaking of hypnotic suggestion. There is a broad field, and one that is white unto the harvest, for this more intense form of suggestion, but I am not willing to advocate its use by the average school teacher.

The first opportunity you have try the following simple experiment: Take to your school room a perfume bottle labeled "Rose Water." Before doing this be sure that no odor of its former contents remain. Fill the bottle with water. Take also a bottle labeled "Quinine" along with you.

Exhibit the perfume bottle, calling attention to the label. Explain how rose water is procured, and speak of its delightful odor. Tell the children that you desire to find out who among them has the sense of smell most highly developed. Then sprinkle the floor with the supposed perfume, and ask your pupils to hold up their hands as soon as they detect the odor. You will be surprised to note how quickly many hands go up. Proceed along the same line with the bottle labeled quinine which contains only pulverized chalk. If you have used tact, and have made your suggestions strong, on tasting, your children will find it as bitter as quinine itself.

During the holidays I went out shooting a few times. On my return home in the evening, I had only to close my eyes in order to see a fine convey of birds just ahead of me. Also falling asleep at night I could see them in my dreams. These images were not the result of vibrations of the optic nerve, for such vibrations had long since ceased, but the result of suggestion upon the subconscious mind which still clung on to the images long after the objective mind had lost consciousness.

To further illustrate this susceptibility, and especially that phase of it under the stimulus of an operator, I will give you a group of experiments which I have personally performed a number of times.

A friend who is willing to be influenced, sits down and assumes a passive state. I ask him to close his eyes and listen to what I shall say. Then concentrating my mind upon the desired result, I say, "Think of nothing in particular, but allow your mind to follow my suggestions. Your eyelids are heavy; they are growing tired now; they are sticking tight. When I count three you will not be able to open them. One, two, three; you cannot open your eyes! Try!" I have found that a large majority of both children and adults are unable to open their eyes.

I then ask my friend to stretch out his arm, and make the muscles hard, and say, "Look me directly in the eyes; now your arm is becoming stiff; the muscles are getting as hard as iron; you cannot bend your arm! Try! You can't!" After removing the suggestion all the stiffness disappears, and I then tell him to clasp his hands together and I proceed as before to so stiffen the fingers as to make it impossible for him to get them apart though he try never so hard.

One more experiment of this order will doubtless be sufficient, though they may be given in large numbers. After the subject has seated himself in a chair proceed as follows: Say to him, "Look me in the eyes and concentrate your mind on the suggestion I shall give you. Your knees are stiff; you cannot bend them; you are fastened to the chair; you cannot get up! Try!"

When the subject consents to "think of nothing in particular" there is a suspension of activity in the cerebral centers. In this passive or relaxed state there is a minimum of blood in the brain. He is then ready to receive suggestions, and these suggestions are transmitted to the centers of imagination in the brain. Thus extreme sensibility of certain cerebral centers is conjoined with great insensibility of others. An effusion of blood fills the sense-organism of the one and leaves the motor centers of the other inactive and benumbed. In the experiments cited the subjective mind received its impression from the objective which had received its impression from the suggestion of the operator.

The suggestibility of the subject depends upon physio-psychological conditions mentioned above. On one occasion I was giving some demonstrations before a large audience. As I proceeded I noticed a young man (a druggist of the town) standing near my left, looking on with rapt attention. His eyes were dilating, his nostrils quivering and his mouth was open. I was in rapport with him and I knew that I had reached what Dr. Lee would call a "psychological moment." I sprang to his side and closed his mouth and said: "You cannot open your mouth; you cannot speak; you have forgotten your name; you cannot speak it! Try!" A puzzled expression came upon his face. He made several attempts to speak but could not. He was standing near a piano. Turning around he leaned his head down upon the piano for a few moments, then with an effort like a man awakens himself from a night-mare he said "Cyrus."

In each of these experiments the suggestions were made first upon the objective mind, and through it reached the subjective; but they may be made directly upon the first. This is done by what we are pleased to call "mind reading" or "thought transference" or "telepathy."

The fact of this theory is established beyond question. Scarcely a day passes in which there is not a vindication of its principles. Set your eyes upon a person across the street, or in a great crowd, and will that they look your way, and they obey you.

In company with several persons an idea suddenly comes into your mind, but before you have time to speak of it some one of the company speaks of the same thing, and you say, "I was just going to speak of that myself." Some person's name is mentioned and the conversation turns upon the person mentioned, when suddenly the one of whom they were talking appears upon the scene. This is done so often that we say, "speak of the angels, and you can hear their wings." Not that your speaking of the person will make him come, but having started, his subconscious mind goes before and tells you of his coming.

Among a company of students one evening I was blindfolded and told to find an object which had been hidden. Four of the young men concentrated their mind on the spot where the article was placed, and assuming a passive state I followed the guidance of their minds. I supposed that I would find the object of my search in the house, but against the judgment of the objective mind I opened the door, walked almost the length of a long porch, took hold of a post and swung off the porch, kneeled down and reaching far under the floor, and under a block of wood, I found the article.

Sometime since a man whom I had met but once came to me and said that he wanted to speak to me of certain matters. I received the thought at once and told him that I knew of what he would speak and asked him not to do so as it would save embarrassment. He insisted on my telling him of what he wanted to speak, and much to his astonishment I not only knew the subject but the position he would have taken.

About two years ago I was giving a talk to a small crowd at prayer meeting. As I talked I noticed the rapt attention of one of the audience. As I proceeded, and as my eyes rested upon him, there came rushing upon me like an inspiration a new line of thought. When I had dismissed, the good brother came to me and said I had stolen his thunder. I confessed to the theft, but told him that I had done so unconsciously. I had come in rapport with him and he had transferred his thoughts to me and I had grown eloquent by the inspiration. Having become as familiar with the sub-conscious mind and its susceptibility to suggestion, both through the objective, and independent of the objective mind, as time will permit, it only remains for us to consider in the third place,

III. The Ethics of Suggestion in Pedagogy.

As stated in the beginning, the teacher has charge of the child at the most susceptible period of its life, and this too under the best possible conditions for the giving of suggestions both of the destructive and of the constructive kind, which are of equal importance in the building of the character. The child recognizes the superior mind of the teacher, and at once assumes a passive condition which is open to suggestion. His subjective mind is yet in the ascendancy, and as this mind receives impressions without criticism, the teacher has it in his power to make or mar. The child is as open to suggestion of the wrong as he is of the right, both mentally and morally, hence the greatness of your possibilities and the gravity of your responsibility. You need no longer feel helpless in the presence of a dull and stupid child. It becomes your privilege and your duty not only to study "the point of contact" but to bring the child in rapport with yourself and by this almost super-human power correct evil tendencies. When this "psychological moment" has been reached you have resting upon you a responsibility which is awful in intensity. You stand in closer relation to it than father or mother, brother or sister, Sunday school superintendent or preacher; and it becomes your duty to act as the "Viceroy of the Almighty" in the use of this marvelous power and sacred opportunity. And I tell you candidly that I verily believe that the perpetuity of our government and the happiness of our country depends upon your attitude toward this new science.

How important it is that you learn that there is something in personal magnetism, and that you should conquer by force of your own personality, and not by corporal punishment. Fear of punishment does not in the least correct the evil propensities of the child. As well whip him for being bow-legged as to whip him for moral or mental warp. I recall the experience of a certain teacher in dealing with a younger brother of mine. The teacher anxious for his welfare administered on an average three whippings per day, but with absolutely no results as he remained incorrigible.

In these modern times parents are inclined to depend almost entirely upon the teacher of our public schools for the training of their children. How often do we hear a mother say, "I will be glad when school opens, so I can get rid of you; I can't do a thing with you." Thus "children unnaturally stupid, of sluggish intellect, born without the ordinary ability to concentrate thought or rivet attention, embarrassingly self-conscious, so that the mind becomes a blank under the pressure of a necessity of reflection, or if thoughts are there the vocalism refuses to express them"—children who are indolent, contrary and disobedient, and who have a propensity for lying, stealing and smoking of cigarettes are placed in the keeping of you teachers.

I think you will agree with me therefore that the problem is in the dealing with these oblique phases of the child life and not in dealing with the well balanced and normal life. Shall these who are born moral and intellectual cripples go through life a burden to themselves, and a curse to their fellows, or will you use the mighty and God given powers which you possess, in their emancipation?

"Our criminal population is an outgrowth of misspent childhood, the early stages of which educational influences are called upon to develop and suppress through moral, intellectual and physical means. It is both a science and an art, endeavoring to adjust opposing elements and to blend bodily health with mental and moral strength."

Permit me to emphasize my statement that the problem of your calling is not in dealing with the moral but with the abnormal child. The usual methods, no doubt, meet the demands of the one but fall far short of the demands of the other. These last go

through our public schools on into our industrial and state reform schools, and from the penitentiaries to the gallows.

Beside the blighting and blasting, the corroding and damaging influence of these perversions there is also the great criminal cost added to our government. Instead of expending so much for the apprehension and the punishment of the criminal, we ought to seek rather the preventative of crime.

There is a psychology in crime, and the study of criminology has developed two distinct schools or groups, known as "criminal anthropology" and "criminal sociology"—the first claiming that criminals are born, not made, and the second that they are made, not born. But a broad and unprejudiced study will convince us that both heredity and environment has to do with the question. But the phase with which you have to do, at least directly, is not "whence" but "whither." The discovery of the cause does not of itself remove the effect.

But whatever the cause of mental and moral obliquity it is a fact of too great importance to be neglected, that these conditions yield readily to both constructive and destructive suggestion, an illustration of which I give in conclusion.

Sometime since three young men came to me as I was passing through a certain town where I spent the night, and asked me to cure them of the cigarette habit. I succeeded very quickly in bringing the minds of two of the young men in rapport and proceeded first to give them destructive suggestion. I told them of the deleterious effects of such a habit, how that it benumbed the physical, mental and moral man, and how it leads to a surrender of ambition and a desire of success. I dwelt at length on this phase, then gave strong constructive suggestion. I told them of the brightness of the future for them, how that there was no desired position in life which might not be theirs if they would but try. I then told them that all desire for cigarettes had disappeared, and that their system would feel no shock for the lack of the stimulant.

I have a letter from one of these young men stating that he and one of the young men had been permanently cured, and that they had not even desired to smoke a cigarette since. I did not succeed in the case of the third young man because I did not come in rapport with him, which is the SINE QUA NON to success.

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