AN ANALYSIS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO RECREATED FOLKTALE SELECTIONS

by 45

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I. INTRODUCTION

The great difference between the discipline of education and other academic pursuits lies in the profound necessity to act -- a continuous process of compelled motion. Few dispute the need to reveal known truths, insights, and useful procedure to the huge masses of young people. Often this task is so overpowering that perfection of pedagogical techniques and increased educational sophistication loom as the unattained utopian goal. The lack of criticism toward teaching as a goal in no way reflects the bitter feelings held by many about how such a process is to be performed. No doubt the gap between the masters of knowledge and the masters of application will never completely disappear. In other fields, however, the scholarly mind has emerged increasingly more often from a life of first hand experience. There is no reason to suppose that this trend can not also affect the discipline of education to a far greater extent.

Given the obvious necessity to have conscientious teachers be exposed to more data which can produce significant insights into emotional behavior leads to the major tentative question posed as a point of departure for this project.

Statement of the Problem

Can a direct investigation of recreated selections of folklore by high school students reveal significant insights about the effect that the nature of emotion has on the learning process for these students?

Importance of the Problem

The cry for scholars to transcend the fetish for basic research is no where more loudly uttered than in the field of education. There is, furthermore, ample reason for such a plea. The proliferation of personality data--much of which is understood so well by psychologists and philosophers to be considered commonplace--still has yet to make a significant impression upon the mainstream of educational thought. The gap between that which is known and that which is applicable will widen unless educators also indulge in observation. On all levels of scholarship in the social sciences there is a profound need to observe behavior and the functioning of personality, devoid, as much as possible, from the mythology of the past. It is unrealistic to suppose that many teachers will conduct a study such as the one which follows in this paper under the system of rewards now provided by American society. This paper can do nothing more than serve as a suggestion about what can be done with data derived from the classroom.

If interest in the subject of emotion can be used as a yardstick for importance, the relevancy of this study will not be difficult to demonstrate. Even those remotely interested in education should be profoundly aware of the recent enthusiasm displayed toward creativity, the growing emphasis placed on the arts, and the ardent attempt to establish programs which develop individual talents. Subjects not usually considered of instrumental value to scholarship are no longer shunned as being unimportant. Even for those who specifically concern themselves with academic matters, education has, in the past decade, taken an instrumental turn.

The noted educational philosopher, J. E. Bruner, defines the truly important tasks of the future and what this means for the field of edu-

cation.

> If we want to look ahead to what is special about a school, we should ask how to train generations of children to find problems, to look for them.
>
> What is needed is a sense of how to teach their use in converting chaotic messes into manageable problems. Much of the attraction of the use of discovery in teaching comes, I suspect, from the realization of the need to equip students in this way.
>
> A second special requirement for education in the future is that it provide training in the performance of "unpredictable services." ...I include here the role of the teacher, the parent, the assistant, the stimulator, the rehabilitator, the physician in the great sense of that term, the friend, the range of things that increase the richness of individual response to other individuals. I propose this as a critical task, for as the society becomes more interdependent, more geared to technological requirements, it is crucial that it not become alienated internally, flat emotionally, and gray. Those who fret and argue that we are bound to go dead personally as we become proficient technically have no more basis for their assertion than traditional romanticism...
>
> Third, what human beings can produce and no device can is art --in every form: visual art, the art of cooking, the art of love, the art of walking, the art of address, going beyond adaptive necessity to find expression for human flair.[1]

The training for these three tasks will demand an ever increasing awareness on the part of the trainer, of the emotional influence on the pupil. Success no longer can be defined in terms of scholastic aptitude when the performing of such tasks is defined as the goal. Notice, Bruner did not mention the types of troubles to be converted into problems, the approach of the friend, or the form human art should take. Each of these tasks to be performed has an existential end in itself. This all contributes to the thesis that preparation for the teacher must increasingly include more insight into the fundamental nature of emotion because, (1) to attain such lofty heights, they will need to overcome barriers which many students today never overcome. It is necessary for students to enjoy testing their limits free from the fear of that traditional

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[1]Jerome S. Bruner, "Culture, Politics, and Pedagogy," Saturday Review, May 18, 1968, pp. 71-72.

reception provided for those who fail. (2) Given the absence of viable facts about how to perform these important future tasks, preparation of rote material--even much of what is now felt to be on a conceptual level--is a clear waste of the students' time.

What can a method of empiricism, such as that used in this study, contribute to the understanding of emotion? Many of these observations will overlap the section on philosophy, but to establish the importance of this project, it is necessary to direct some attention toward the value of action research and particularly, this method of researching.

Much has been written about the value of classroom experimentation, and the results from projects such as the application of sociograms, in many ways, could produce results which are as objectively true as the methods used in this project. This project is aimed at testing the emotional limits and capacities of students but with a specific purpose in mind. Remembering folklore, so far as this writer can discern, required neither immense capacity for rote retention or the infinitely creative effort. It is simply the transmission of ideas and objective occurrences without the help of the written word. Since much of what man is called upon to do requires imagination and insight of the type which can neither be classified as having been memorized or created, folklore, as a media, has infinitely greater value to the field of education than is now commonly recognized. If students end up learning more during recess than in the classroom, it will be the fault of the educational system and not of the playing children. But folklore in this study is being used only as a mirror into the emotion, not as a display of emotional creation. The data, as contained in the lengthy appendices is objective. Each of the students recalled that which is

written; the reader will have to judge whether the analysis is accurate. Herein lies the greatest value of this paper; the data and statistics are objective, but the conclusions are theory. If every study could make such a claim, the educational process would be a great deal easier in the opinion of this writer.

The need for action research to be conducted and published is best demonstrated by the following excerpt from a reputable education journal:

> . . .Not shouting and not nagging, as she had done before without success, she said with real sincerity and existential involvement, "Tommy, go to your classroom." The tone of her voice left no one in doubt that she was in command of the situation. Tommy, who in similar incidents before had shown resistance, went obediently. As for the teacher, this experience became a turning point in her relationship with her students.[1]

This passage is not part of a fictional story; it was included in an article purporting to discuss discipline problems. Clearly, no responsible student of education can absolve himself from the media of information from which he works particularly when it is kept well in mind that the journal from which the foregoing quotation was extracted may well be the only significant educational outlet for thousands of practicing teachers.

One other issue should help to establish further the importance of action researching. Richard I. Miller has noted the following:

> The average beginning teacher probably gains during the first three years on the job perhaps 75% of the experience needed to cope with problems that are benefited by experience, and five years may provide over 90% of the possible benefit.[2]

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[1]Rolf E. Muus, "First Aid for Discipline Problems," NEA Journal (Sept., 1963), p. 11.

[2]Richard I. Miller, Perspectives on Educational Change, (New York, 1967), Appleton-Century-Crofts, p. 11.

Since there is commonly a lack of emphasis on the affective domain and the behavior resulting from emotional stresses and revelations in teacher education--particularly research in the field--the average teacher must rely upon experience to complete his education. This "hand in the flame" method may work satisfactorily in dealing with simple emotions of classroom origin or those which can be effectively understood within the classroom, but will doubtless falter when confronted with emotions of a more mystical origin--even if the overt behavior pattern is nothing more than a yawn or expression of general boredom. Are three to five years of experience going to help even an excellent fifty-year-old teacher deal with hippies and seemingly senseless symbolism which necessarily surrounds that movement? At the risk of being redundant, it will no doubt help to know that English factory workers were once required to shave their heads as a health precaution. But another factor -- besides those which are expressly factual -- can be profoundly brought to bear on the problem. This factor loosely can be called a study of the nature of emotion and is of paramount importance to the field of education.

This method of educational researching -- which is novel so far as this writer's knowledge is concerned -- is only one method of discovering certain emotional factors. It is offered as one suggestion -- a point of departure -- into vast areas which badly need empirical attention. Similar research styles are not beyond the classroom teacher and could provide a needed bridge between experience and training -- either if available in written form or as a model for individual research projects.

Limitations

It would be quite impossible to discover or relate all of the studies and speculations concerned with the topics dealt with in this paper. Many of the conclusions and findings, no doubt, parallel much of that which has already been done. The major value probably lies in the procedure, rather than any actual results--at least not the type of results that lend themselves to general conclusions. It may appear that a major limitation of this paper is the inability to come to conclusions. The phenomenon is more the result of the area of study and is symtomatic of most studies dealing with emotion. This study, in many ways, competes poorly with much of the basic research which has already been conducted, particularly in the areas of sociology and psychology.

The sphere from which judgements were derived pertain to students of high school age--specifically the eleventh grade level. The cross section of students who recorded versions of these four tales is somewhat random. Two of the classes were judged by the teacher as being moderately above average in scholastic achievement (Appendices A, B, E, and F) and two slightly below average ratings (Appendices C and D). Four English classes were tested and since eleventh grade English is required, no significant groups (except the mentally retarded and the highly accelerated students) were deleted from the study. The high school, taken as a whole, is judged to be somewhat below average in academic achievement of the three public high schools in Topeka, Kansas. Although this sampling is certainly not scientifically random, the attempt was made to insure an average response. However, this sampling is limited--certainly if one were going to make universal generalizations about high school behavior and emotional influences.

The tales selected also somewhat limit the results of this project, as they certainly do not magnify all of the critical areas of paramount importance to the classroom regarding emotional influences. Whenever an attempt is made to expose or "brainstorm" possible areas of importance, rather than centralizing the investigation upon certain issues--as is the usual research procedure--many limitations exist. Perhaps it can be said that the study is limited to the degree that it does not reveal that which could be revealed with such a method. Just which tales or other excerpts from literature which might prove more enlightening or produce responses that mirror other areas of importance, is strictly a matter of conjecture. The selections were made on the basis of shortness, vocabulary, number of references to moral and ethical issues, and that each selection qualified as folklore. These selections may or may not limit the viability of the findings, depending on what the reader expects to discover.

The major limitation of the paper concerns objectivity--or which conclusions can be verified. There are no true conclusions. At best, the material, if examined, can only help structure or question generally held beliefs. But, after all, even the most demonstratable facts are subject to belief. One often tends to believe that a study is important, not on the basis of its validity and reliability, but on the basis of how well it contributes to other held beliefs. One way out of this dilemma is not only by the discovery of more valid information, but also by including infinitely greater numbers of people in the observations. In this way, the credibility gap can be reduced. The conclusions are subjective, but supported by direct first-hand data--data, moreover, which is available for further speculation in the Appendices of this

paper. Further speculation, however, will still be subject to the same doubt as the conclusions of this writer.

Definition of Terms

Transmission. One student's entire recreation of a single tale is referred to as a transmission. These transmissions are separated in Appendices A, C, D, and E by single numbers. When Style 1 and Style 3 are used, single numbers forwarding each transmission set it off from the one before. An example of this is "No. 1" followed by "No. 2." Transmissions recorded with the use of Style 2 are set off in Appendices B and F by two numbers, the first is the number of the student who is telling the tale and the second number denotes the listener. Examples are: "No. 1 to 2" and then, "No. 2 to 3." While being investigated, specific transmissions are identified with this numbering system.

Metaphysics. ". . .the branch of philosophy that deals with first principles and seeks to explain the nature of being or reality..." is the definition of metaphysics.[1] Metaphysics postulates a priori concepts as adequate verification--or before the happening, such as the existence of God or moral ethic not derived from an observation of that which works or has been demonstrated as empirically viable.

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[1]Joseph H. Friend and David B. Guralnik, eds., Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, (The World Publishing Company, Cleveland and New York, 1960), p. 925.

II. PROCEDURE

There were four eleventh grade English classes involved in this project.[1] The members of these classes were initially asked to participate in the recreating of four different tales--Tales 1, 2, 3, and 4 which are fully reprinted in Appendix G. Initially, two styles of retelling the tales were planned. (With the use of Style 1, this writer read the tale twice to the entire class.) Then each student was asked to recreate a version orally. This oral recreation was tape recorded in a small office; each taping was conducted with only the individual and this writer present in the office.[2]

With the use of Style 2, a pupil was privately (in the office) told the tale once. He was then instructed to recreate his version for a second pupil and the tape recorder at the same time. In turn, this second student told a third, etc. Only this writer and the two pupils were in the office while the tales were being told (except the first and last transmission where only this writer and one pupil were present).[3]

Style 3 resulted more by accident than intention. It was discovered that thirteen of the twenty-six recordings (one class where Tale 1 and Style 1 were being used) were lost because the tape recorder malfunctioned. So two days later, the students whose reproductions failed

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[1]For a general description of the classes, see the "Limitations" section.

[2]Use of Style 1 can be noted in Appendices A, C, and D.

[3]Use of Style 2 can be noted in Appendices B and F.

to record were asked--without having the original retold--to recreate their respective versions.[1] These recording sessions occupied four class periods on April 24, 1968.[2] Two additional class periods were used on April 26, 1968.[3]

An informal method of giving instructions was used, as it was felt that reading the instructions might be too formal for high school students. The basic word used for describing what they were being asked to do was "recreate." If a confused student inquired further, he was then asked to "retell the story." On several occasions, it was necessary to expand with the use of "tell your version," "tell the story as best you can," or "reproduce the tale." Students were asked to avoid expanding the tale or purposefully creating novel responses.

These tapes were then transcribed. Appendices A, B, C, D, E, and F are the written versions of the recorded material. Often a student corrected himself; in such a case, only the correction appeared written, unless the correction indicated confusion and lapses from the previous remarks. In this latter case, all of the words appear.

The punctuation is entirly subjective--designed to facilitate the reading of the material and to roughly indicate train of thought. The period was used when obvious pauses indicated transition and an impending new idea or when a new grammatical sentence began. The comma indi-

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[1]These thirteen reproductions are printed in Appendix E.

[2]Transmissions are printed in Appendices A, B, C, D, and E.

[3]The students in one class were above average. Therefore, they were asked to record on both days--using Tale 2 the first day and Tale 1 the other (versions printed in Appendices B and F). The other class which recorded April 26 were the previously mentioned students whose recordings had been lost two days before.

cates slight transition or where grammatical sentence construction obviously required a comma. Parenthetic enclosures denote asides, descriptions not consistent with the general flow of the version, or repeated lines which were felt essential to the understanding of the version being presented. Necessarily, this punctuation is imperfect and an exact recount of important tonal varience, pauses, and indicators of positive or negative enthusiasm can not be precisely noted. Special effort was taken, however, to produce an accurate written version of the oral transmissions. Many times, these versions lent themselves poorly to written construction, so misinterpretation is possible but not likely--certainly not for the great majority of the transmissions.

Some colloquial words were printed in correct form, e.g. "gonna" was printed "going to," but only when the expressed word was an obvious indicator of the correct word. "Ain't," for example, was not changed. The changes made were really more for convenience; it was very difficult, for example, to differentiate between "cause" and "because."

III. PHILOSOPHY

In many ways this philosophy section is nothing more than an elaboration of the importance of the problem, as the two subjects are inextricably inseparable. It really goes beyond the scope of this project to reveal the many who might support or dispute the purpose set forth and the method used to reveal emotional factors. The philosophical position which justifies this project will merely be revealed. At the outset, it is worth noting that many scholars from assorted disciplines have been supporting a similar system of thinking. The problem is that this system is not monolithic-nor should it be. To instruct an uncertain student to perform an uncertain task with capacities that are immeasurable, demands a philosophy devoid of traditional metaphysics.

Traditionally, the pragmatists and, in psychology, the Gestalts, provided the most realistic definition of the uncertain man. It can, in the mind of this writer, no longer be disputed that newer schools have paralleled and greatly expanded some of the same notions of these early theorists. Despite the continuous criticism of progressive education, many of the nineteenth century humanistic perceptions which produced the progressive movement are still very much alive.

Comments on the subject by Paul Nash should reveal that twentieth century thought can not be rightly separated from educational practices.

> Both existentialism and Zen Buddhism, in different ways, have reminded us, if we need to be reminded, that we should not deprive the individual of the privilege of experiencing life for himself by trying to tell him

> what it means, by supplying abstract answers before he has even framed a question. Especially in a largely spectator culture, education should increasingly be placing emphasis upon the question, upon the quest, upon the irreplaceability of personal experience.[1]

But the orientation for this paper is not monolithic. This writer is profoundly aware of what applying the scientific method can produce for education. However, it will not serve as or replace a basic philosophic orientation, any more than a computer can perform miracles unless it is told what miracles to perform. In this sense, it might be said that for this paper there is a balance between philosophy and science; not just a religious belief in science.

It is so easy to lose sight of the basic concept calling for individual freedom, even for those who profess to believe in the principle. Consider the following quote from an educational journal:

> ...getting a child to accept adult controls and gradually to take them on as self-controls is the most important and rewarding thing we parents and teachers can do.[2]

The subject of getting a child to accept adult controls is a legitimate educational problem. Few would advocate that a classroom should be conducted without having pupils understand and accept discipline of some sort. The ethic of conforming to adult standards is not consistent with the principle of individual freedom. There is a profound difference between demanding certain behavior of students and "brainwashing"

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[1]Paul Nash, "The Strange Death of Progressive Education," Educational Theory, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April, 1964), p. 75.

[2]Lois H. Griggs, "Children Want Controls," PTA Magazine, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Nov., 1962), p. 30.

them into believing that these demands are morally right. This illustration should help to show the position from which this paper was written.

It may be argued that this method of researching fails to produce anything substantial--such as theories or laws from which to develop methods of classroom procedure. This, however, is not a fault of the study. Despite what many scientifically oriented behaviorists maintain, the nature of emotion such as anger and fear can not be adequately detected by studying the nature of behavior. Consider the following illustration: How will an angry man (because of a bad day at the office) react toward his wife? He might ignore her, complain about an over-done steak, or tongue-lash her for going to the hairdresser. Given these incidents and the other limitless possibilities, can a behaviorial scientist possibly discern statistically the emotion which was supposedly the cause? If he does, he ends up with a limitless number of emotions--all containing only the act as a descriptive definition of such an emotion. This position is very similar to one held by A. I. Melden, Chairman of the Philosophy Department, University of California, Irvine, California.[1]

The last issue in this section is the establishment of at least some idea about what emotion consists of. This is best done by describing an emotional experience. It should be noted that this explanation is of no great value in understanding the following analysis. It is added only to further illustrate the position from which the analysis was written.

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[1]A. I. Melden, Free Action (New York: Humanities Press, 1961).

Donald Arnstine defines an emotional experience as:

> First, the experience is taken to be valuable on its own account. Whether or not the experience is instrumental to the attainment of other experiences, it is felt to be satisfying and fulfilling in itself.
>
> Second, the experience is marked by the arousal of effect (emotion) as a result of the individual's having perceived some formal articulation and integration of the elements of which the cue for that experience is composed.[1]

Later, he explained in greater detail the second concept:

> ...the extent to which the relations (describable in an empirically verifiable way) within a given cue for experience more or less easily lend themselves to being apprehended aesthetically--that is, as form.[2]

John Dewey, in his book, Art as Experience, has relegated an entire chapter to a concept of the emotional man. In the following, he clarifies Arnstine's first point:

> Since the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved, he does not shun moments of resistance and tension. He rather cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities, bringing to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total. In contrast with the person whose purpose is esthetic, the scientific man is interested in problems, in situations wherein tension between the matter of observation and of thought is marked. Of course, he cares for the resolution. But he does not rest in it; he passes on to another problem using an attained solution only as a stepping stone from which to set on foot further inquiries.[3]

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[1]Donald Arnstine, "Shaping the Emotions: The Sources or Standards for Aesthetic Education," School Review, Vol. 72, No. 2, (Autumn, 1964), p. 247.

[2]Ibid, p. 251.

[3]John Dewey, Art as Experience, (New York: Minton Balch & Company, 1934), p. 15.

Dewey expanded upon the not unknown concept of "form":

> Wherever there is this coherence there is endurance. Order is not imposed from without, but is made out of the relations of harmonious interactions that energies bear to one another. Because it is active, order itself develops. It comes to include within its balanced movement a greater variety of change.[1]

This should illustrate that there are qualities specifically of emotion; it is not like studying a vacuum. To understand the nature of emotion in the manner envisioned by this writer will require the recognition that a different philosophical base exists and is significantly removed from Aristotelian logic, Judeo-Christian ethic, and most European metaphysics. For this reason, a far too brief section on philosophy has been included.

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[1] Ibid., p. 14.

IV. FINDINGS

No doubt the most fertile source of data derived from this project came from the recordings of "The Son Who Tried to Outwit His Father".[1] It was possible to observe several different kinds of reactions with this tale, as all three styles of retelling were tested.[2] Further, this was the exact tale which was used by F. C. Bartlett in his experiments with English graduate students.[3] Interestingly enough, students seemed to be more enthusiastic about remembering and recreating this rather involved and repetitious tongue twister. Very certainly, those students who were asked to transmit this tale composed the best equivalent to the true folklore situation.

Before comparing the data from this study with Bartlett's somewhat arbitrary generalizations, some initial observations will be made. In some ways, the changes found in wording and, more significantly, the ethical overtones, parallel those found by Bartlett.[4] However, the rather unique modifications often found by this writer warrant separate investigation because Bartlett used a written media for recreation instead of having his subjects retell orally, and there are points worthy

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[1]See Appendix G, Tale 1.

[2]See Appendix G for a listing of the Styles and the definitions.

[3]F. C. Bartlett, The Study of Folklore, ed. Alan Dundes, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 243-258.

[4]Appendices A, E, and F.

of note which apply only to oral transmission.

Another reason that Tale 1 is ideally suited for a study of this type is that both the several lines at the beginning and the ending line are of major importance. The repetitious metamorphosis midway in the tale seemed to serve as a challenge to the memory of most of the students, but it is of no major analytical value. If there was a concerted effort to memorize parts of the tale, the metamorphosis--first into the final hiding place and then to be revealed by the father--seemed to serve as a test of memory for most students. Consequently, the beginning and end are left freer from memorization, particularly when Style 3 (student to student) was being used as was the procedure for the transmissions recorded in Appendix F.[1]

It should not be presumptuous to conclude from a simple observation of the original version that the general theme is that of a game between a father and his son--admittedly with overtones of the father's wisdom--but no mention is made or directly implied of a cause for this friendly contest. The opening statement: "A son said to his father one day, 'I will hide and you will not be able to find me,'" and the final line: "The son was so dumbfounded that he never again tried to outwit his father," clearly establishes the mood as one of sport--certainly not of crisis--between the two. After twenty-five transmissions, the story reads, "It's the story about this boy who ran away from home because he thought he was being abused. . .And the moral of the story is that the boy never ran away again." There are radical changes here and at many other points in the data that warrant consideration.

Simultaneously, the twenty-five transmissions in Appendices A and

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[1]See Appendix G for the listing of the Styles and definitions.