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Student Interests, Their Relevance to and Employment In "Democratic" Education: A Guide for Practitioners

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Forward

It is a privilege and a great delight for me to be able to make some remarks about my friend and mentor, Dr. Abel King Fink and his doctoral dissertation.

Dr. Fink is a native of Rockaway Beach, New York. He graduated from Columbia University in 1956 and moved to Buffalo, where he began a forty year teaching career at Buffalo State College.

My first contact with Dr. Fink was in October 2012, at a meeting of Phi Delta Kappa (a professional organization dedicated to promoting education). Dr. Fink and I connected, and quickly got to know each other really well. We often spent time discussing academic and other issues of mutual interest. The issue of student motivation in educational planning and instruction was always discussed.

Dr. Fink has been active in the community, where he served as a consultant and trainer in psychodrama and group dynamics. He is a fellow in the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama and in 1996 received the J. L. Moreno Lifetime Achievement award. He also served as president of the Psychological Association of Western New York. In 2013 he received a Phi Delta Kappa Distinguished Career award in recognition of his contribution to education and dedication to the organization. In 2003 he co-edited a book, THE EARLY HISTORY OF HOSPICE BUFFALO.

As a person Dr. Fink exemplifies the ethics of love, compassion, trust and humility. He is a person of focus and commitment. These dispositions, I believe endear him to his students and others.

Dr. Fink is a pioneer, way ahead of his time in curriculum development and instruction based on student interests. I first read Dr. Fink’s book, STUDENTS SPEAK: REACTIONS TO CLASS EXPERIENCES AT BUFFALO STATE COLLEGE, and found it intriguing. I wondered how a professor could choose to let students take center stage in class “when he should be the one handing down knowledge to them.” I grew up in the mainstream traditional class instructional approach where the teacher was in the center and would hand down the same material year in year out to different groups of students as if their minds were “blank slates”. I wondered how Dr. Fink managed to facilitate classes with students exploring their interests. I was curious and wanted to find out more about the philosophical foundations on which his instructional approach was based. This led me to this doctoral dissertation. Then I understood that Dr. Fink was practicing what he believed in and cared about as far as curriculum content and instructional methods were concerned.

With an academic background in psychology, human development, group dynamics and curriculum development, Dr. Fink used a multidisciplinary approach to explore student interest and its relevance to education, with the aim of providing a guide to educational practitioners to make a difference in the lives of students.
I found this dissertation so fascinating because the things he discussed in 1956 are still fresh and real, even today, as we confront challenges in the education system. His student-centered approach to curriculum development and instruction was revolutionary for its time for subject/teacher-centered approaches are still prevalent to this day.

Dr. Fink’s dissertation presents a challenge to educational professionals. When student interests are an essential part of curriculum students are intrinsically motivated and the instructor can dedicate his energy to teaching efficiently. Both teacher and student will derive intrinsic satisfaction from the teaching and learning experience. When subject matter does not align with student interest, is becomes a Herculean task for the teacher to motivate students; such a task may even prove impossible to achieve. A teacher who calls upon student interests in the formation of curriculum will have more interested students and better learning.

I believe this dissertation can prove helpful to student trainees, curriculum planners and educational practitioners as they attempt to approve student learning.

Father Augustine Ayaga September 2013
Preface

When I entered Columbia University graduate school in 1950, I elected a program that I hoped would enable me to make a contribution to the field of education. I had an academic background in engineering and liberal arts, with a major in psychology and choose courses that would combine educational theory and practice with psychological understanding. These included sequences in human development, group dynamics, and curriculum development. I also studied psychodrama and group psychotherapy. After three years of graduate study and additional years as an elementary classroom teacher, it was time to develop my doctoral dissertation. I decided to explore the subject of interest and its relationship to the educational process.

Having completed my formal education, I entered the world of higher education as a professor at Buffalo State College. During the next 40 years I taught many subjects, guided by the ideas I had explored in my doctoral project. Later, in retirement, I published in book form, an overview of my educational efforts. The book, STUDENTS SPEAK: Reactions to Class Experiences at Buffalo State College* expresses, in the words of students who had participated in the classes, a verbal view of what the classes were like. It is now available in print and on line. I believe it indicates how the theories that I developed in my dissertation can be put into action in the classroom.

I decided to put this volume on line because of requests from readers of the book to explain more fully, the theory upon which my classroom activities were based.

* A joint publication of E. H. Butler Library and the Monroe Fordham Regional History Center, Buffalo State College, [http://digitalcommons.buffalo.edu/bookcase/1/](http://digitalcommons.buffalo.edu/bookcase/1/)
STUDENT INTERESTS, THEIR RELEVANCE TO AND EMPLOYMENT IN "DEMOCRATIC" EDUCATION: A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS

A Report of a Type C Project

by

ABEL KING FINK

This project is recommended for approval by the Student's Project Committee whose individual certificates of approval are on file in the Advanced School.

Alice M. Miel, Member of Committee
Stephen M. Corey, Member of Committee
Kenneth F. Herrold, Major Adviser

Approved by the Committee on the Degree of Doctor of Education

Date APR 12 1956

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in the Advanced School of Education

Teachers College, Columbia University
1956
An individual's interests play an important part in the course of his growth and development. They serve as themes around which his behavior is organized and help to channel his energies into creative and satisfying endeavors. Indeed, to a large extent, a person may be known and judged by the character of his interests.

Although one may have many interests, some will be of greater importance than others, and a few may have a really deep personal significance. Such interests have here been termed "Life Theme Interests."

Deep-rooted Life Theme Interests do not spring into being full-grown; instead, they are frequently the result of developmental processes which may extend throughout a large part of the individual's life. At first, healthy interests may be fragile entities, but, given the proper conditions in which to grow, they may gradually unfold their many facets, providing their possessors with rich and creative experiences.

Considering the important role that interests play in the life of the individual, one is forced to conclude that the encouragement of significant and healthy interests is a fundamental responsibility of democratic education.

The writer wishes to thank those who were kind enough to read this manuscript and to offer their suggestions and
comments. He is especially grateful to Professors Alice M. Miel and Stephen M. Corey, Committee Members, and Professor Kenneth F. Herrold, Committee Chairman, for their helpful and constructive criticisms. His thanks go also to the several educational practitioners who have been so good as to comment on the practicality of some of the hypotheses herein outlined.

The writer also wishes to acknowledge his debt to the many authors whose works have been consulted. He is principally indebted to William H. Kilpatrick and the late John Dewey for their philosophical contributions and to Donald Snygg, Arthur W. Combs and Arthur T. Jersild for their psychological formulations. But for the efforts of these and other thinkers, the present project would have been impossible.

To his family and personal friends who have given continuing encouragement, his special thanks are extended.

A. K. F.
# Table of Contents

## Part One: Introduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part Two: Interest Defined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>Interest as Process</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest as Process</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Genesis of Interest</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Interest as Object</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universal Interests</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common Interests</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Interests</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Life Theme Interest</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Nature of Life Theme Interests</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dealing With Life Theme Interests</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Personal and Social Significance of Mature Life Theme Interests</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part Three: Interest Analyzed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>Some Psychological Aspects of Interest</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Frame of Reference</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Psychology of Interest</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Unhealthy Interest</td>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. INTEREST AND SOME DEMOCRATIC OBJECTIVES</td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Democratic Objectives</td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and the Democratic Objectives</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. STUDENT INTEREST AND THE CURRICULUM: SOME</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS</td>
<td>168</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interests and the Selection of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Matter</td>
<td>170</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Considerations of Method Relating to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>184</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing For Aroused Interests</td>
<td>196</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART FOUR: SUMMARY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. STUDENT INTERESTS, THEIR RELEVANCE TO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AND EMPLOYMENT IN DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION</td>
<td>214</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Summary</td>
<td>214</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some General and Action Hypotheses</td>
<td>227</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>237</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In both Psychology and Pedagogy there is scarcely a question of greater importance than the question of the nature and significance of "Interest."

Yet there is hardly a question that is so far from a satisfactory solution or even from a conformity of opinion on its essentials as the question of interest. . . . Moreover, the definitions of interest often fall short of clearness and logical consistency, either because contradictory factors are introduced into the concept itself, or because certain of the constituent elements of the definition do not agree with fundamental psychological premises . . .

Because of its fundamental importance in practical pedagogy, there exists an urgent need that the doctrine of interest be brought out of this confusion of views into greater clearness and uniformity.

Wilhelm Ostermann, 1895

That children's interests shall have a significant role in planning and interpreting the curriculum is clearly indicated by the literature. But what that role should be is another problem. Some educators hold that the curriculum should be based upon the present interests of pupils. Others hold that because of the temporary and transitory nature of children's interests the curriculum must be based upon something more fundamental . . . Between these positions there are many proposed modifications or combinations, sadly complicated by the diverse meanings which are attached to the terms "children's interests."

Irving R. Melbo, 1940

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employment in democratic education.

3. To prepare a document that might be of value to educational practitioners setting out to study the part that student interest plays or might play in educational practice.

The document has three specific objectives:

a. To present a broad outline of the subject which is rich in content drawn from the writings and experience of philosophers, theorists and practitioners.¹

b. To discuss the educational significance of the issues that are raised and to suggest certain practical ways in which student interests may be dealt with by practitioners.

c. To formulate the findings in such a manner that creative thought and action research might be encouraged on the part of educational practitioners.

¹The words "philosophy," "theory," "practice" and "practitioner" will here be used with the following meanings: "Philosophy" will refer to the goals and objectives of education as they have been stated by educational thinkers. "Psychological theory" will refer to conceptual frameworks developed by psychologists in their attempts to explain the phenomena of human behavior. "Educational theory" will indicate conceptual systems set up by educators in their efforts to find ways and means by which the aims and objectives of educational philosophy might be expressed in educational practice. "Educational practice" will refer to the actual behavior of students and teachers in the schools. The term "practitioner" will refer to professional educational workers.
This project has been designed as an exploratory, not a definitive study. For this reason, no attempt has been made to establish "final truths." Rather, the present endeavor has aimed at sketching an outline of the subject which might serve as a point of departure for future investigation and study.

A large number of generalizations have evolved during the development of the project, many of which are of a very tentative nature. They are to be thought of as "educated hunches" or guesses—consistent with and growing out of the synthesis and analysis of the material at hand—and not as validated "truths." They are formulated here in the hope that they will be tested in practice.

Procedure

The project's development consisted of several steps:

1. The major aspects of the subject to be considered were blocked out in outline.

2. The literature in several fields was surveyed with special emphasis on that in the areas of psychology and education. Material was selected for inclusion on the basis of its perceived relevance to the objectives of the study.

3. The project was written, special care being taken to concretize abstract portions through the use
of illustrative material.

4. The document was edited to enhance clarity of presentation.

Sources of Data

Although much of the material used in the project was found in the literature, several of the hypotheses had their origin in the educational experiences of the author. The sources of data were threefold:

1. Literature in the following fields which seemed germane to the study purposes:
   - Educational Philosophy
   - Educational Research
   - Curriculum Development
   - Teaching Methods and Materials
   - Child Development
   - Learning Theory
   - Social Psychology
   - Educational and Psychological Tests and Measurement
   - Sociology
   - Anthropology
   - Group Dynamics
   - Individual and Group Psychology
   - Individual and Group Psychotherapy

2. Records compiled from the experiences of the author in observation, action research and teaching.

3. Informal interviews with such practitioners as teachers, students and educational specialists.

Background of the Project

Educational. The last few years have witnessed
efforts on the part of many educational practitioners to make classroom practices more democratic in character. Findings in the field of group dynamics have begun to be reflected in work with younger students.¹ Workers in curriculum development have become increasingly concerned with cooperative learning procedures as expressions of democratic living.²

At the same time, there has been a continuing tendency, especially on the part of thinkers in the area of child development, to stress the need to make provision within the school program for individual difference; to establish programs through which individual students might be encouraged to develop their unique potentialities.³

In this setting, value was seen in an effort to reexamine the concept of interest--one of the oldest in education--in order to study its relevance to trends in educational thought and practice.

Psychological. Since the turn of the century when

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²See Alice Miel et al., Cooperative Procedures in Learning (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1952).

the educational significance of interest was considered by such writers as Dewey\(^1\) and Ostermann,\(^2\) psychology has made great advances. Recently, developments in phenomenological theory have gained importance in contemporary psychological thought, providing the educational worker with several promising theoretical concepts.\(^3\)

This project examines interest in terms of certain aspects of phenomenological theory in the hope that this analysis will enable practitioners to employ the concept with greater understanding.

Theory, research and practice. All too frequently, some of the best educational ideas have gone for naught because of difficulties involved in transforming them into practice. Moreover, certain theories that have been validated by accurate studies, have still not been accepted by practitioners.\(^4\) One reason for such difficulties


in bringing about change is the fact that theory and research have often been considered to be the concern solely of specialists in these areas.

Educational theory has often been thought to be a complicated matter which could only be understood by trained educators operating in the "ivory towers" of higher education, far removed from the everyday problems troubling teachers and other school people who work directly with young people. Educational research, on the other hand, has been considered to be the special occupation of trained research workers using the latest scientific tools, whose findings could be considered to be "the truth."

Such a specialization of function, to the extent that it has existed, has led to a widespread scepticism on the part of educational practitioners as to the practical significance of the efforts of theorists and researchers. Moreover, with theory and research in disrepute, practice has tended to be frozen in its traditional forms.

Recently, there has been a growing realization that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory"¹ and that research is a legitimate function of the practitioner.

¹Attributed to Kurt Lewin, a pioneer advocate of action research.
In the study of human relations, it has become increasingly evident that social change necessitates change in people and that such change can most effectively be brought about through the widest possible participation on the part of the persons concerned.¹

It is in this context that the concept of action research has been developed. Action research is a "process by which practitioners attempt to study their problems scientifically in order to guide, correct and evaluate their decisions and actions."² It has been recommended as a method by which educational workers can solve their own special problems and at the same time grow in their capacity to put the resulting learnings into practice.³

Personal. The author, having had the privilege of taking his graduate training at a time when the wedding of theory, research and practice was at the threshold of realization, considered it appropriate to attempt to blend these elements in developing his doctoral project.

¹For some representative readings in this area, see Kenneth D. Benne and Bodizar Huntyan, Human Relations in Curriculum Change (New York: Dryden Press, 1951).


At the culmination of a course of study which was interdisciplinary in nature—combining training in the fields of educational psychology, group dynamics and teaching and curriculum—it seemed natural to select a topic of some importance to both educational and psychological thought and to attempt to treat it in such a way as to make the resulting document useful to practitioners involved in study and research in their own situations.

The Project's Relevance to Educational Change

In initiating educational change, several preliminary tasks must frequently be accomplished:

1. Problem areas having real significance should be selected for investigation.

2. The terms to be employed should be clearly defined so that a meaningful conceptual analysis of the problem area may be carried out.

3. Action hypotheses—statements suggesting possible outcomes resulting from procedures to be tried—should be formulated.

The present project attempts to prepare the ground for action research by making a contribution to the accomplishment of these objectives as they pertain to the general subject of student interest.

Significance. The available literature indicates a
widespread belief that interest is a matter having wide application and significance in educational practice. An attempt has been made here to present and examine the reasoning upon which this assumption is based. This treatment, it is hoped, will stimulate the reader to reexamine his thinking about the role that interest plays and might play in education.

**Definition.** As will be soon noted, interest is a rather poorly defined term. This is due primarily to the fact that thinkers have generally neglected rigorous definition in their emphasis on certain operational aspects of the process.

Much of several chapters of the project are devoted to an analysis of the term's meaning. It is hoped that these discussions will give added meaning to the concept of interest and thus allow it to be employed more usefully in educational discourse and study.

**Hypotheses.** Throughout the course of the project, an attempt is made to explore the practical educational significance of the various issues that are raised. Much of the content of these discussions may be employed as a basis for the formulation of action hypotheses. This is especially true of Chapter VI, "Student Interest and the Curriculum: Some Practical Considerations," which deals
directly with ways and means by which student interests may be employed in curriculum development. Part II of Chapter VII abstracts in outline form some of the principal action hypotheses that have been presented and discussed in the body of the project.

The various generalizations and action hypotheses are presented in the hope that they will be useful to the research minded practitioner as he formulates his own hypotheses in preparation for educational experimentation.

An Overview

The project consists of seven chapters organized into four parts in the following manner:

Part One: Introduction

I Introduction

Part Two: Interest Defined

II Interest as Process

III Interest as Object

Part Three: Interest Analyzed

IV Some Psychological Aspects of Interest

V Interest and Some Democratic Objectives

VI Student Interest and the Curriculum: Some Practical Considerations

Part Four: Summary

VII Student Interests, Their Relevance to and Employment in "Democratic Education"
Part One in an introductory chapter in which the nature of the project is described.

Part Two is primarily concerned with the matter of definition. It explores the concept of interest in two meanings, as process and as object.

Chapter II deals with interest as process. After an introductory section in which the present status of the concept is examined, it presents a description and discussion of the elements of which the process of interest is composed. Chapter II also contains a brief section in which the factors relating to the genesis of interest are examined.

Chapter III is concerned with interest as object. Universal, common and individual interests are described and discussed with special emphasis being laid on the characteristics of individual interests. In the second section of the chapter, the concept of the Life Theme Interest is introduced. A general hypotheses is elaborated, namely, that individual interests, especially those of potential Life Theme quality, should be encouraged because of their great significance for human development and societal well-being.

Part Three considers interest from three angles, the psychological, the philosophical and the educational.

Chapter IV, "Some Psychological Aspects of Interest,"
after presenting some fundamental concepts of the psychological theory within which the project is written, considers certain aspects of the psychology of interest, with special emphasis on the relatedness of interest to self. Interest as it relates to learning and to mental health is next considered, and the chapter ends with a discussion of unhealthy and anti-social interests.

Chapter V, "Interest and Some Democratic Objectives" describes certain fundamental concepts of democratic thought and discusses the relevance of interest to these objectives. The chapter suggests two major hypotheses: (1) the encouragement of healthy interests is expressive of the democratic obligation to respect personality and (2) interest may be most adequately and democratically provided for if students are enabled to take the responsibility for the identification and nurturing of their own interests.

Chapter VI, "Student Interest and the Curriculum: Some Practical Considerations" deals with interest in its educational setting. It considers various ways in which interest has been and may be employed in curriculum development and raises certain issues concerning the role of student interest in regard to the content and the process of the educational experience. It suggests the hypothesis that the school must provide opportunities for students to
develop their unique individual interests if it is to fulfill its obligation to encourage the greatest possible growth on the part of its young people.

Part Four, which consists of Chapter VII, contains a comprehensive summary of the issues raised during the course of the project, as well as an outline of some of the more important general and action hypotheses.

Conclusion

The first chapter has attempted to orient the reader to the project as a whole. Before proceeding, one further word may be in order.

This project is intended to stimulate the reader to mental and research activity in a field which is relatively poorly defined. It is hoped that it will encourage him to examine and rethink his previous notions regarding the place of student interest in the school program and to attempt certain new approaches to curriculum development in his own situation.

To achieve these objectives, material has been gathered from several sources. It has been organized so that some of the more significant educational issues concerning the topic of interest might be presented in clearer contrast. From an analysis of the available material, a large number of hypotheses have been phrased which may or may not have practical validity to say
nothing of philosophical justification. Such statements are tentative, they are to the most part merely guesses or hunches. They await experimental investigation.

Whether or not the project will be successful in achieving its objectives depends to a large extent on the attitude assumed by the reader. If he approaches the project as if it were a definitive presentation of all that we know about interest, he will be disappointed. He may find some references to the sources of such information, but he will discover that most of the material herein presented is suggestive, tentative rather than final.

If, on the other hand, the reader considers himself to be an investigator, a person who himself can delimit knowledge—especially as it pertains to his own situation—then the project may have greater value. With its general outline of the field and suggested hypotheses, it may provide a frame of reference against which such a reader may clarify his thinking and formulate action research problems.
PART TWO

INTEREST DEFINED
CHAPTER II

INTEREST AS PROCESS

I. INTRODUCTION

A fundamental weakness in efforts to deal effectively with interest may be traced to the term's lack of a rigorous definition. Unless the concept of interest can be delimited with some degree of accuracy, attempts to employ it in practical situations will be difficult if not impossible.

In this section of the project, the question of definition is broached. Although the resulting findings are tentative, they may suggest a framework from which a more rigorous definition can be constructed. This discussion will also make it possible to employ the term with greater meaning in the remainder of the project.

The Problem of Definition

Although "interest" is used constantly in daily speech, it is a word which is not easily defined. When employed as a technical term in education or psychology, the confusion surrounding the term is even greater. That this lack of definite meaning is not a recent development is indicated by Ostermann writing some sixty years ago:
Some regard interest as a matter of intellect; others as a matter of feeling; others, again, as a matter of volition, and still others as a combination of these various elements.

To one person it is identical in meaning with the concept apperception; to another person it is identical in meaning with the concept attention, etc. Moreover, the definitions of interest often fall short of clearness and logical consistency, either because contradictory factors are introduced into the concept itself, or because certain of the constituent elements of the definition do not agree with fundamental psychological premises.¹

That such confusion concerning definition still exists is testified to by Berlyne. Reviewing the literature in 1948, he identified so many different types of definition of interest that he had to develop a scheme of classification. His list of types of definitions includes:

A. Meanings of "interest" referring to some aspect of all forms of motivation.
   1. A state of the organism.
   2. A quality of the stimulus.
   3. A relation between organism and stimulus.
B. Meanings referring to special forms of motivation.
   1. "Variation" and "satiation-resistance."
   2. Curiosity.
   3. "Formal beauty."
C. Meanings referring to the place of "interest" in personality and ego-structure.²

Strangely enough, research in the field of interest


has proceeded without much concern for definition, especially in regard to interest as process.

The literature clearly indicates that many educators have given much time and attention to the development of check-lists, tests, questionnaires, and other means of measuring or identifying children's interests. As pointed out by Weeden,1 "throughout all the period of perfecting techniques of measurement, interest has remained undefined. The validity of interest measure has not been determined in terms of a definition of interest, but in terms of . . . external criteria."2

Berlyne, in his review makes the same point, noting that Thorndike in his works on adult interest3 discusses the influence of interest on learning but "nowhere offers a definition" and that Fryer in his comprehensive work The Measurement of Interests,4 merely defines interests as "objects and activities that stimulate pleasant feelings in the individual."5

1Vivian Weeden, "Research Needed in Interest Evaluation," <i>educational research bulletin</i>, <i>March 17, 1937</i>.


On referring directly to Fryer, one finds the following statements:

... Today interests are more clearly defined by their measurement. They are named from the objects and activities, the psychological stimuli, which engage the attention of the individual. ... In a measurement sense, subjective interests are likes, which are estimated experiences characterized by feelings of pleasantness.¹

... Measurement of ... the subjective interests, has been made largely by the use of the interest inventory. This is a standardized form of questionnaire ... a list of interest situations to which one responds by circling those things which he likes or dislikes.²

Although these definitions may have justified the use of certain interest tests, they have tended to throw little light on the nature of interest as process. As Berlyn has concluded, "the problem of definition of 'interest,' let alone that of the psychology of interest cannot be said to have been solved."³

**Interest as Object and Process**

In the following discussion, the term "interest" will be used in two senses, as object and as process.

---


²Ibid., p. 18.

Interest as object will be defined as that which is the focus of attention of the interested person. In this sense, stamps are the interest of the stamp collector.

When certain psychological processes on the part of the person are referred to so that he is described as "being interested," (as the stamp collector is interested in stamps) the term will refer to interest as process.

The present chapter is concerned mainly with a description and analysis of the characteristics of the psychological process of being interested. It also includes a brief section on the genesis of interest. Chapter III deals with interest as object.

II. INTEREST AS PROCESS

"I'm so glad to hear that Jane has become interested in English!"
"Jimmy seems to lack interest in school. Is there anything that I can do to help him to become interested?"
"I find my work with children so very interesting!"

In each of these statements, reference is made to interest as a psychological process. That this condition is both common and significant is generally accepted. Nevertheless, agreement is lacking in regard to the concept's exact meaning.

This section consists of a discussion of the elements which make up the state of being interested.
Interest is a conscious matter for the stamp collector; he knows that he is interested and is aware that stamps are the objects of his interest. Moreover, stamps hold a position of importance in his field of awareness, they tend to occupy his thoughts, "his mind is full of stamps." Ideas relating to his interest recur and tend to monopolize his attention.

Being preoccupied with thoughts of stamps, his perception of his environment is affected accordingly. He is selectively perceptive, that is, he is predisposed to note objects which appear to be related to his interest, and to ignore objects which seem to be unrelated.

Although philately may be his principal interest, the collector may also possess other interests. Which matter will be of greatest interest at any particular time will depend upon his total situation at that moment. Under certain circumstances, other matters may have greater saliency than stamps in coming to his attention.

The philatelist finds active concern with his interest to be accompanied by a pleasant emotional tone. He gains a feeling of satisfaction, of affective well-being when he is involved with his interest. In the same manner, he finds that factors which block the expression of his interest tend to elude unpleasant emotions. Suppressive conditions are felt to frustrate and inhibit essentially healthy strivings on his part.

When conditions permit, the stamp collector will express his interest in his outward behavior. He will engage in many types of physical and mental activity which is related to his interest in stamps. He may do intensive research, take trips to museum exhibits, attend stamp auctions, or take part in any number of other such activities.

An interested stamp enthusiast will be motivated to communicate about his interest. He will be eager to talk about his interest and to hear what others may have to say upon the subject. He may communicate with stamp dealers or read widely in philatelic publications in order to remain well informed of happenings in the world of stamps. Moreover, he will tend to seek associates with whom he may share information and experiences connected with his interest. He may become affiliated with a stamp club, not only to enlarge his collection, but also in order to enhance his personal well-being.
Having outlined some of the characteristics of an interested person's state, the discussion now moves to a more detailed analysis of these elements, the aspects of interest as process.

1. The Conscious Aspect

Interest is a conscious process. An interested person is aware that he is interested and is able to identify the object of his interest. Although both the degree of clarity with which his interest is held, and the breadth of activities which he perceives to be associated with his interest may vary considerably, as long as the interest exists for him, the person may be described as "being interested."

The fact that interest is a conscious process may be readily integrated into the phenomenological view of personality, in which the inner world of the person is of central concern.¹ This view is deemed more appropriate to the present task of definition than an external or behaviorist orientation in which the external manifestations of a person's behavior—his actions as they are noticed by another—are the major source of data.

The phenomenological orientation allows for

¹For a consideration of the principal assumptions of phenomenological psychology, see Chapter IV.
recognition of two facts which an external view might not admit: (1) a person may possess interests which for one reason or another are not expressed in his overt behavior and (2) a person may occupy himself outwardly in activities which do not interest him.

**Educational significance.** In the past, much research activity has been devoted to the development and application of devices for the identification of interests --as if interests were mysterious entities which could only be discovered through the use of complicated scientific instruments. If interest is a conscious phenomenon, however, other research approaches may be more pertinent to practical educational needs.

In later chapters, the thesis is developed that the school's task in regard to interest encompasses such objectives as: establishing an environment in which students may locate new interests; providing outlets through which students may nurture those interests that have been located and facilitating the development of healthy interests while discouraging the growth of unhealthy ones.¹ In each of these areas, research efforts might usefully be applied.

¹See especially Chapter VI, "Student Interest and the Curriculum: Some Practical Considerations."
Prominence of interests in the phenomenal field. Within the interested person's phenomenal field, the objects of his interest hold a position of primacy and importance. Thoughts of his interests tend to recur, he is predisposed to "have his mind on his interests." In more technical terms, interests have a tendency to monopolize the figure aspect of the interested person's phenomenal field.¹

Since interests tend to pervade the phenomenal field, it may be hypothesized that the degree to which a person is interested in a certain matter can be gauged by the extent to which his mind is occupied by thoughts relating to that matter. A procedure which would enable an investigator to chart the volume of an individual's thoughts on a certain subject would provide a quantitative measure of the degree of his interest.

It may be difficult to predict which of a person's several interests will fill his thoughts at a particular time, nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suppose that immediate significance is an important factor. An interest which is perceived to have special significance

¹For a discussion of such terms as "figure" and "phenomenal field" see Donald Snygg and Arthur W. Combs, Individual Behavior: A New Frame of Reference for Psychology (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), Chapter II.
within the circumstances prevailing at a particular moment might be expected to have priority over other interests in coming to attention, regardless of the extent of its perceived significance over an extended period of time.

In this way, a person who is an enthusiastic stamp collector may find himself thinking continually about a forthcoming vacation. His long-term interest in stamps remains, but for the moment, his other concern has a more urgent appeal.

Educational significance. If it is indeed a fact that interests pervade the thoughts of students, teachers desiring to use interests as educational resources must find ways in which they may come to understand what is going on in the minds of their students.¹ Activities which facilitate two-way communication between student and teacher, techniques which enable teachers to study student thinking,² methods whereby a teacher may establish an empathic relationship with his pupils,³ all may be of

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²Such activities may include the analysis of student compositions and other written work, or the study of the verbal contributions of students in class discussions. See also, "Identifying Life Theme Interests in School," p. 90 below.

³See the discussion of "Empathy," p. 152 below.
value in enabling teachers to recognize the real concerns of their students.

Sometimes, teaching is conceived of as a "battle for attention." In this view, the teacher's task is to make the class activities of such great momentary interest that the students will no longer be concerned with their unique individual interests.\textsuperscript{1} Although at times this objective may be desirable, it is frequently difficult if not impossible to accomplish. Student interests tend to have an air of personal urgency about them which is seldom generated by regular classroom activities. A way of overcoming this difficulty—one which is considered at length in a later chapter—is to base school activities to a larger extent upon the interests of students.\textsuperscript{2}

**Interests influence perception.** Because of their importance in his phenomenal field, a person's interests tend to influence his perception of his surroundings. A person's interests determine, to some extent, both what he will perceive and how he will perceive it.

\textsuperscript{1}In this case, teachers sometimes fall into the trap of making the presentation interesting while leaving the subject matter untouched—and still uninteresting. See p. 190 below.

\textsuperscript{2}See for example "Individual Interest Projects," p. 178 and "Group Interest Projects," p. 162 below.
Selective perception. The primacy of interests in the thoughts of the interested person is associated with the psychological phenomenon of selective perception.\textsuperscript{1} In this process, there is a tendency for the individual to select from the field of his experience those elements which seem to have some bearing upon the object of his interest. In other words, a person tends to see things in his environment which are of interest to him.

Given a wide variety of stimuli, those which are perceived to be related to his interests will have primacy of notice. Elements not so perceived may be ignored or remain completely unnoticed. As Kilpatrick has observed:

\ldots An abiding interest in any matter is precisely an abiding tendency toward set and readiness with regard to that matter. \ldots The readiness accompanying interest means a higher degree of sensitivity to anything that promises a significant bearing on the object of interest. These two facts make for higher efficiency; a person interested along a given line will, as occasion offers, pursue that interest actively in the degree of the interest felt; he will, further, in the degree of his interest, be keyed to sense anything that promises to affect significantly the welfare or upbuilding of that interest. \ldots \textsuperscript{2}


... It should also be pointed out ... that while interest brings positive readiness for anything that promises to foster or promote the interest, it as truly brings unreadiness for any line of action which thwarts or threatens the interest.\textsuperscript{1}

Another and related process is that in which the person tends to perceive elements related to his interest even when they are not present. For example, the stamp collector may notice a colorful scrap of paper on the ground and perceive it as being a stamp. He is in effect, interest prone.

\textit{Educational significance.} These phenomena have importance for education, for they suggest that unless what is provided the learner is perceived by him as being interesting or related to his interests, he may not be aware that it exists. In this way, a student may not hear a lecture although he may be physically present in class; he may not see the assigned material although the text is open before him and his eyes are scanning the page.

On the other hand, a student may hear and see elements which are related to his interests regardless of how insignificant they may be in relation to the context in which they are presented. Indeed, these bits and snatches may be the only elements of which he becomes aware of all the content that is presented.

Such facts should give pause to those who insist that all students be exposed to the same subject matter. The exposure may be standard, but the reception will be far from uniform.

Perceived significance of interests. A person perceives the objects of his interest as being of worth and importance, as having a positive significance for him. An interest is not neutral in valence, rather, it has an attractive quality which makes it intriguing. It is conceived of as being of value, something which will serve to enhance the personality of its owner. It seems to have within its scope the possibility of contributing to the richness of its possessor's experience. As Dewey has phrased it:

... The genuine principle of interest is the principle of recognized identity of the fact to be learned or the action proposed with the growing self; that it lies in the direction of the agent's own growth, and is, therefore, imperiously demanded, if the agent is to be himself.¹

There is a perceived relationship between the object of one's interest and himself.² A bond is recognized between a certain realm of thought or activity and one's well-being. Activity in the area of a person's interest is


²See "Interest and Self," p. 110 below.
seen by him as being beneficial to himself, as contributing to his self-enhancement.

Another way of putting this is to say that the person is ego-involved with the object of his interest; that he is aware that his own fate is in a measure tied up with and dependent upon his engaging in activities related to his area of concern. Dewey has stated this relationship as follows:

... Interests are one in principle. They all mark an identification in action, and hence in desire, effort, and thought, of self with objects; with, namely, the objects in which the activity terminates (ends) and with the objects by which it is carried forward to its end (means). Interest, in the emotional sense of the word, is the evidence of the way in which the self is engaged, occupied, taken up with, concerned in, absorbed by, carried away by, this objective subject matter.1

2. The Affective Aspect

Interest is also an emotional process; involving oneself with something interesting is a pleasant, enjoyable experience. The activity is intrinsically satisfying; it is felt to contribute to one's self-fulfilment. In other words, interesting activities are rewarding in themselves; they are something that one likes to do. Dewey

has described the pleasure related to interest as being:

... found wherever there is successful achievement, mastery, getting on. It is the personal phase of an outgoing energy. This sort of pleasure is always absorbed in the activity itself. It has no separate existence. This is the type of pleasure found in legitimate interest. Its source lies in meeting the needs of the organism.1

The emotional aspect of interest has long been recognized, indeed, some sources consider it the salient characteristic of interest. The Dictionary of Psychology gives as its first definition of interest, "feeling which accompanies special attention to some content"2 and Webster's lists "excitement of feeling, accompanying special attention to some object of concern."3

In addition to emotions of a pleasant nature—those which accompany a person's consideration of or active involvement in activities which are of a healthy, growth-producing character—are those feelings which are aroused when interest is blocked. When the positive strivings of interest are blocked or suppressed, the individual may experience the negative feelings of anger and hostility.

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which are often associated with frustration. The intensity of a person's emotional reactions, both positive and negative may have significance in indicating the degree of his interest.

**Educational significance.** Because of its emotional aspect, interest should not be trifled with. The student who is deeply interested gains intrinsic satisfaction from his interest and will not lightly suffer interruption or criticism; moreover, he may resist with vehemence, attempts to block or discourage its expression. Marking may become a sensitive operation when the matter being evaluated is of real interest to the student.¹

When the significant interests of students become the basis of school activities, classroom endeavors will frequently be accompanied by pleasant feelings. Smiles and laughter may be common, the entire atmosphere may be pervaded by the excitement of interest. When, on the other hand, the interests of students are ignored, feelings of active resentment or passive apathy may prevail. The relationship between classroom atmosphere and student interest may offer an intriguing challenge to the educational investigator.

¹This was the case in the individual interest project described on p. 178 below.
Interest being a process closely related to self, teachers who attempt to deal with the more significant interests of students may find themselves becoming more intimately involved in the feelings of their students than is normally the case.

Much of the subject matter that is commonly taught in school may not be of very much interest to students. It frequently fails to "reach" them because it has little if any connection with their personal well-being. Interesting subject matter is different however; being perceived as personally significant, as related to self, it "touches home," eliciting emotional reactions which are frequently of a rather personal nature.¹

Although such emotionally charged content may be somewhat demanding of teacher time and energy, it may well be worth the extra effort. Since interesting matter strikes close to home, the learning that takes place may have great significance for the student. Neutral subject matter may be easier to teach because of the absence of emotional factors but may have little personal significance and,

¹Providing educational experiences which are of deep significance to young people should not be confused with psychotherapy. The former seems a legitimate function of the educator, while the latter, relating to unique personality difficulties, rests in the province of the psychotherapist. For a discussion of this question, see Progressive Education, 32 (May, 1955), an issue devoted to "Therapy and Education."
therefore, limited educational value.

Teachers who become involved with the deep concerns of young people must be both psychologically and professionally prepared to deal with emotional reactions on the part of their students.¹ The question of what this might entail in terms of the pre- and in service training of teachers seems to merit investigation,² as does the whole problem of dealing effectively with the emotional aspects of student interest.

3. The External Aspect

It has already been noted that interest is a function of the internal life of the human being. Interest would not be quite as important a process as it is, however, if it were not also true that, given freedom of activity, a person will tend to express his interest in his external behavior. Interest as thought tends to become interest in action, if the opportunity is present.

¹See Arthur T. Jersild, In Search of Self (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1952). This volume suggests the importance of dealing with the emotions of students within the educational setting and the responsibility that this entails for the teacher.

The expression of interest. A person may express his interest through physical and communicative activity and by seeking associates having similar interests.

Physical activity. The interested person has an urge to concern himself with the objects of his interest; the manner in which he does so being dependent upon the nature of his particular concern. The stamp collector may express his interest through buying, examining, mounting, or trading stamps; while the music lover may go to concerts, study an instrument or listen to recorded music. There is probably no end to the various modes which the physical expression of interest may take.

Communication. People are also impelled to talk and otherwise communicate concerning their interests. They seem to have a natural urge to tell the world about their concerns. Because of this tendency, one need not remain long with a communicative stranger before learning a good deal about his interests. Indeed, one of the principal ways in which we come to know another is by discovering the scope and nature of his interests through communication.

Association. Related to the individual's urge to impart information concerning his interest to others, is a tendency for him to seek associates with whom he may share
his interest. He seems to have a need for an audience, persons who will be interested in the substance of what he has to communicate about his interest.

If others, through their needs to communicate, can provide a person with experiences which enable him to nurture his interests, while at the same time he can contribute to the enhancement of their interests—if the relationship can become one of mutual give and take—a solid basis for group formation may be present.

Frequently, because of the character of particular interests, group experiences are required in order for them to achieve expression. Nevertheless, even when interests may find adequate expression in solitary activities, the entire endeavor may gain enhancement through one's awareness that there are others having similar interests with whom he may share his experiences.

Educational significance. When conditions permit, a student may express his interest in a number of ways. In addition to direct involvement with the matter of interest, he may write compositions about it, read books and other printed material related to it, draw pictures or construct models of it, or join groups in which he may find an outlet for expression. Needless to say, once a vital interest is in the process of free expression, there will be little
doubt on the part of an observer that such an interest actually exists. The major educational problem in this instance is that of making adequate provision within the school program for the free expression of interests on the part of the student body.

Since people have a general tendency to communicate about their interests, one of the easiest ways in which a teacher may identify student interests is to take special pains to listen to or read what students have to tell about their interests. If the teacher is able to gain the students' confidence and listen carefully, there is every reason to believe that information concerning interests will become readily available.

Such information, when freely communicated, will, of course, be no more explicit than the interest itself. The more clearly defined an interest is in the mind of the student, the clearer his verbal description of it will be, depending upon how willing he may be to divulge such information.

It should be emphasized that the degree of permissiveness of one's environment plays a crucial role in the manner in which a person will express his interests and, indeed, may determine whether or not they will find expression at all. In an environment of suppression, it may be rather difficult for an outsider to achieve an
understanding of the interests of another.

The Suppression of Interest

Although it may be natural for a person to express his interests, his environment will frequently limit or block such expression, intentionally or otherwise.

A certain amount of intentional blocking is perhaps necessary if society is to accomplish its task of acculturation. By encouraging certain interests and discouraging others, children may be guided in learning the ways of their particular culture. Such intentional blocking arises out of the accepted philosophy of the society and may only be criticized in the degree to which it expresses the spirit of that philosophy. 1 Whether or not steps will be taken to identify the sources of unintentional interest blocking will also depend upon society's view of the general value of interest development.

Regardless of philosophical considerations, however, when the blocking of interest expression is carried to an extreme, damage may be done. The number of times that resistance to interest development may have led to personal tragedy through the destruction or distortion of an essentially healthy process may never be known.

1 The relation of interest expression to certain objectives of democratic thought is considered in Chapter V.
The poorer personality. When interests are blocked by intense pressures at their outset, they may be effectively squashed, eliminating forever the positive contributions to which their expression may have given rise. Such suppression of interest may deprive an individual of the fulfilment of certain of his potentialities. The ignoring of interests may have as damaging an effect as active blocking. As Smith has noted:

... Children are usually interested to the limit of their capacity in the things in which they are actively engaged and though a particular child interest may seem trivial to an adult, it is the tender plant to be cultivated to the full flower of worthwhile social interest and activity. Too often the interest is ignored and like a tender plant in sterile soil it withers and dies. The world is filled with adults whose personalities are colorless because of their shallow interests. These same persons might, in their youth have been guided in interest development. If there is to be interest growth, the apparently trivial but normal child interest must be accepted as the point of departure.

Undermining self-confidence. The forces serving to suppress interest expression may undermine a person's basic confidence in himself and his feelings. Confronted with a continual barrage of directions such as the

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following:

"It would be nice to continue this discussion, but now it is time to get down to work!"
"Would you please put that down and pay attention!"
"Stop talking and listen to me!"
"Stop what you are doing and get your mind on your work!"

the youngster may begin to wonder if his internal feelings have validity; if what he feels to be of value or interest is actually of importance. He may even begin to feel guilty about having his own private concerns.

When much of a young person's school experience consists of incidents in which he is told to leave his own concerns and become "interested" in other areas—matters which he may find quite uninteresting—the student may learn to doubt his perceptions of what endeavors are and are not of interest to him. This may place him in a real quandary concerning how he is to respond to the pressures upon him to suppress his interest expression. In reaction, he may passively submit or he may decide to fight the forces of suppression.

In the former case, he runs the danger of learning not to take action motivated by his own impulses, a negation which may lead to later psychological difficulties. If, on the other hand, he decides to trust his own feelings and resist efforts to suppress his interests, he may become subject to "unsocial behavior" and become known
as a "disciplinary problem." It seems evident that such a predicament will not contribute to the student's mental health or general well-being.¹

**Turning elsewhere.** When one finds that his interests are being blocked or ignored by his formal educational experiences, he may decide to turn away from these sources of frustration and seek an interest outlet elsewhere. If, in the course of these unpleasant experiences of having his interests blocked, the youngster develops feelings of resentment and hostility toward the legitimate institutions of society, he may then be ripe for the development of unhealthy or anti-social interests.²

The modern juvenile delinquent is often a striking example of a person whose positive strivings have been neither recognized nor provided for by home or school and who chooses to seek outlets in anti-social behavior, nourished by the more unsavory influences of the community.

**Educational significance.** If the blocking or suppression of interest may have the unfortunate consequences of undermining an individual's basic self-

¹For a consideration of how the nurturing of interests may foster mental health, see p. 127 below.

²See the discussion of unhealthy interests, p. 135 below.
confidence and depriving him of the opportunity to develop and express his positive potentialities, if indeed, it may drive him to anti-social behavior, the justification for such a course of action must be given the closest scrutiny.

The intentional blocking of interest should be carried out with the greatest of caution, while special care should be taken to avoid the occurrence of unintentional blocking. Study of present school practices should be undertaken in order to identify those which tend to block and suppress student interest.

Frequently, the school learning schedule is so crowded that there seems little or no time in which to deal with interest. Such a situation is sometimes defended by the claim that the subject matter being taught is of greater significance to the student's well-being than is concern for his immediate interests.⁴ At other times, individual interests are left unrecognized on the grounds that it is either impractical or impossible to take cognizance of them.

Such matters as these may only be judged in terms of the operational educational philosophy which is finding expression in the particular situation. If student

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¹For a continuation of this discussion, see p. 194 below.
interests are considered to have a place in the curriculum, provision must be made for them in spite of difficulties that this might entail.¹

Summary

Interest is a psychological process, rich in emotional content, in which the individual focuses his attention upon activities or realms of thought which are perceived by him to be positively related to his self; as being able to facilitate his self-realization and enhancement. A person will tend to express his interest through physical and communicative activity and by seeking associates having similar interests and will tend to resent and resist environmental factors which block or suppress such expression.

The degree of a person's interest may be gauged by the extent to which the object of his interest occupies his thoughts, the intensity of its emotional concomitants and the extent and nature of his expressive behavior.

¹See Chapter VI, "Student Interest and the Curriculum: Some Practical Considerations."
III. THE GENESIS OF INTEREST

The genesis of particular interests is a process "clothed in mystery." Gardner Murphy states this in more formal terms when he notes that "it may be possible to observe the genesis of a compelling value or interest within the individual, but not to sunder it by the current analytical methods."\(^1\)

There seems to be general agreement, nevertheless, that the genesis of interest is basically a resultant of the interaction between organism and environment. In some way, an active process of the organism becomes intrigued with certain aspects of its environment and from that moment, interest is present.

The writers on the subject seem to disagree as to how much influence should be allotted to the organism and how much to the environment. Dewey seems to favor the organism when he writes:

\[\ldots\] One is always already doing something, intent on something urgent. And this ongoing activity always gives a bent in one direction rather than another \ldots Wherever there is life there is activity having some tendency or direction of its own.\(^2\)


In this primitive condition of spontaneous, impulsive activity we have the basis of natural interest. Interest is no more passively waiting around to be excited from the outside than is impulse.¹

... Every interest... attaches itself to an object... Error begins in supposing the object already there, and then calling the activity into being. Canvas, brushes, and paints interest the artist, for example, because they help him discover and promote his existing artistic capacity. There is nothing in a wheel and a piece of string to arouse a child's activity save as they appeal to some instinct or impulse already active, and supply it with means of execution... Exactly the same principle holds of the most technical items of scientific or historic knowledge—whatever furthers action, helps mental movement, is of interest.²

Melbo, on the other hand, seems to stress the part that the environment plays in the process:

... It must always be remembered that interests are derived only from the culture-patterns of the group or groups with which the child is in contact. They are acquired, not inherited, although their tap roots may be found in the basic drives or desires which seem to characterize all human life, irrespective of culture.³

Hackett takes a similar view when he states that people can become interested in almost any conceivable

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²Ibid., pp. 19-20.

activity or goal, and that what they do become interested in "is largely a result of the opportunities, encouragement, approval, recognition, and rewards offered in a particular environment."\(^1\)

The debate concerning the origin of interests may be likened to the more general discussion regarding the respective roles of heredity and environment in connection with learning.\(^2\) It should be noted that differences of opinion expressed on this subject have reference only to the degree of influence of the two elements; all sides seem to agree that both organism and environment play a part in the emergence of interest.

The Limitations on Interest Formation

It has just been indicated that the emergence of interest is a resultant of the interaction of organism and environment. This suggests that unless the person has within himself the qualities necessary in order for him to become interested in a particular matter, and unless the

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environment contains certain elements which lead to the stimulation of interest in that matter, such an interest will not develop.

**Environmental Limitations**

The manner in which environment limits interest arousal may be considered from several points of view.

Experience in the field of anthropology has indicated that in general, a society's culture defines the limits within which interests may emerge. A person living in a primitive culture cannot, for example, become interested in such things as electronics or higher mathematics, for his culture does not contain the complex elements necessary in order for interests to arise in these areas.

Studies in contemporary sociology have contributed the added insight that great differences in environmental conditions may exist between the various classes of modern society.\(^1\) It is necessary, therefore, to consider both the specific aspects of the immediate culture in which the person lives as well as the more general cultural features common to the entire society in order to gauge the extent of environmental limits.

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A person living in the complex contemporary culture is also limited in his interests by the extent of his training and experience in various endeavors. It may be impossible, for instance, for the layman to understand the technical problems which concern the atomic physicist, for he lacks the specialized training which would permit such comprehension. His interest in this area is bounded by his experience and training.

Ruth Benedict sums up the role of culture in limiting interests when she observes:

"... His culture provides the raw material of which the individual makes his life. If it is meagre, the individual suffers; if it is rich, the individual has the chance to rise to his opportunity. Every private interest of every man and woman is served by the enrichment of the traditional stores of his civilization."

The developmental psychologist, with his emphasis on the situation in which the child develops, has shown that the same principle of environmental limitation holds. A young person can only become interested in elements which are part of his immediate environment. As Jersild has indicated:

"... The child's interests will be limited by his capacities, but at any level of maturity his capacities are such as to allow for a vast array of particular interests. Accordingly, the particular interests a child has are determined to that extent by the oppor-

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tunity and incentive he has for learning to acquire an interest in this or that thing. His interests will be determined by the equipment and facilities that are available, the enterprises that are open to him, the opportunity he has to get a taste of this or that activity or experience . . . These factors in the environment not only have an important bearing on the specific interests acquired by individual children but also upon general trends in the interests of children at a given maturity level. In other words, interests are to a large degree culturally determined.¹

An individual's general environment must not only contain the necessary elements for the stimulation of interest, but in addition the individual must come into direct contact with these elements; he must become conscious of their existence. Environmental factors may be of potential interest to a young person, but unless he has the opportunity to concern himself with these elements, the direct stimulus for interest development will be lacking. In this way, the best equipped public library will have little significance for the person who is unaware of what it has to offer.

In some cases, active involvement with an aspect of one's environment may have to continue over an extended period of time before the conditions are right for interest emergence. This is true in the cases of specialized activities which require extensive learning before

sufficient background in the subject is achieved for specialized interests to develop. It is such reasoning that frequently is used to support efforts to teach material which is not at first interesting to the student. This is done with the hope that as understanding increases, interest may emerge.

A person's group affiliations are an important part of his environment, for it is the group which mediates and transmits a large part of the general culture to the individual. The group provides the individual with many of the opportunities he is given to interact with the elements of his environment.

It might be noted, that it is the unique experiences that the group provides for the individual that have significance in the emergence of interests, not the general characteristics of the group situation as such. As Kelbo's review of a study of children's wishes indicates:

... Boynton further concluded that "children's wishes or fundamental interests cannot be explained satisfactorily in terms of group causes or affiliations. The child's wishes must go back to the particular experiences through which he as an individual child has passed. Each child is a separate, distinct functioning unit, who to be understood must be studied as an individual rather than as a sample of a real or artificial group." In brief, the results indicate that children's wishes cannot be pre-determined for age, grade, group or economic level.1

1Irving R. Kelbo, "A Review of the Literature on Children's Interests," Children's Interests—Elementary
Personal contact with other people may also have significance in interest development. Friends, associates, teachers, individual members of one's family, may, through their own activities or by suggestion, influence a person's interests whether intentionally or otherwise.

**Educational significance.** Since the content of one's environment sets a limit on his interests, it is reasonable to assume that whatever can be done to enrich this environment will increase the learner's chances of identifying interests which are of deep significance to him. It is, therefore, a primary responsibility of the school to increase the breadth and scope of all aspects of the student's environment so that he may have the greatest possible opportunity to develop his various potentialities.

**Personal Limitations**

The individual's unique characteristics also place a limit on the types of endeavors in which he becomes interested and on the specific ways in which these interests achieve expression.

Sheer ability or aptitude may often be the basis upon which the development of an interest is built. In the

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words of Jersild:

Although the interests of children beyond the early preschool years are decidedly influenced by environmental conditions, they are of course, subject to many limiting factors. Foremost among these is the child's underlying ability . . . Apart from limitations of maturity, there will be controlling factors within the child's own make-up. Thus one child may have more of a knack for music or art than another, and his interests may be influenced accordingly.¹

Intelligence may also act as a limiting factor in interest development. It places a ceiling on the level of complexity which characterizes the interest. Activities which are too abstract in their content will not be understood by persons without the necessary mental capacity with which to cope with them and cannot, therefore, become objects of interest on their own merits.

In addition to aptitude and intelligence, which are mainly physiological in origin, there may be various psychological factors which serve to limit the extent and nature of a person's interests, such as his general level of spontaneity, his predisposition toward sociability or any tendency to be overly cautious or afraid.²

It should be noted that although these factors may limit the kinds of endeavors in which a person can

²Ibid., pp. 478-79.
become interested, they will not necessarily lead to the
development of specific interests. It is only when an
appropriate environment is available that whatever
personal potentialities which do exist may find fulfilment.
CHAPTER III

INTEREST AS OBJECT

The objects and activities in which people become interested cover a wide expanse of territory, being limited only by the boundaries set by heredity and environment. The present chapter considers the characteristics of these objects of interest.

For the sake of clarity, interests may be divided into three categories: "universal," "common" and "individual." Universal interests are held by all persons and are based upon the facts of human existence and physiological development. Common interests are shared by large numbers of people and are founded upon the common cultural settings within which they live. Individual interests are less frequent; they arise out of the unique interaction between each individual and his environment.

I. UNIVERSEAL INTERESTS

Certain interests are universal, they have their bases in human biological processes. Some of these are related to the day by day physiological necessities of living. Such elements as food and warmth, physical activity and rest, serve to preserve a person's physical health and, indeed, his very life; they are needed by all
human beings and serve to initiate interest in their behalf.

A clear distinction should be made between physiological needs and physiologically based interests. A person may have certain physiological needs or tensions which disturb his state of equilibrium. He is not interested, however, until he becomes aware of the existence of these needs and identifies means by which they may be satisfied.

In the realm of nutrition, for instance, a person may have needs for certain food elements in order to retain his physical well-being. Such needs may be identified objectively through the administration of tests, although the individual concerned may not be conscious of their existence. Needs are present but, as yet, interest is not involved.

After the person becomes aware of his nutritional needs—perhaps through the advice of the experts who have conducted the tests—he may be motivated to eat foods which will enable him to satisfy his needs. It is at this point, when the person is conscious of the fact that certain objects, in this case, foods, have significance for his own well-being, that they have a functional relationship to himself, that he may be called "interested."

A physiological state may exist which has the
potentiality of giving rise to the development of an interest in its behalf, but until this state is brought to the person's awareness and he is able to identify means by which it may be satisfied, interest is not present.

This distinction suggests an important educational function. In addition to making direct provision for the satisfaction of physiological needs through such activities as medical and dental examinations and treatment, hot lunch programs and the like, the school would seem to have the further responsibility of encouraging students to become interested in these important areas, of helping them to become aware of their physiological needs and of the various means by which they may achieve satisfaction.

Maturation Based Interests

Other universal interests have developmental bases and are functions of the maturation process. They are aroused as different capacities emerge through the natural growth process. It is such interests which motivate the young person to try out his newly achieved capacities and lead to the consolidation of new learnings.

... As a child develops he has an impulse to put his growing powers into use. When the mechanics involved in creeping, for example, have been established, a child will creep of his own accord even if there is nothing external, such as a toy, to lure him from one spot to another. When his equipment is such that he can stand, he repeatedly tries to stand, even
if there are obstacles and despite unpleasant falls.\textsuperscript{1}

These examples illustrate a principle of development—the principle of indigenous motivation: an integral feature of the development of a capacity or power is a tendency to use that capacity or power. The machinery of development is equipped with a self-starter, so to speak.\textsuperscript{2}

Jersild has also indicated how these interests tend to wax and wane as the child passes through different stages of his physical development:

\textellipsis There is the further fact, of course, that interest in any performance may lag when it is fully mastered and no longer serves as a challenge or as a means toward further accomplishment.\textsuperscript{3}

As a child's abilities mature, and as he becomes capable of new and different interests, he will not only revise, but completely reverse, many of his earlier forms of behavior.\textsuperscript{4}

Interests based on maturation have found some satisfaction within the school program, especially in the younger grades. It is with such interests in mind that provisions have been made for play activity in the primary grades and physical education later on. That much still remains to be done in this respect, particularly with older children, may be seen from the fact that such an important matter as sex education—for adolescents with growing interests in


\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 51.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p. 53.
sexual matters, based to a large extent upon their physiological development—is generally lacking as an aspect of the school program.

As developmental studies reveal more information about the natural developmental interest pattern, corresponding innovations in the educational program may be expected.

**Other "Universal Interests"**

Aside from the interests discussed above, which are tied rather directly to physiological facts, it is difficult to identify other universal interests. This is primarily due to the fact that the further an interest is from physiological necessity, the greater the role that culture plays in determining its nature; and the greater the influence of culture, the less the chance that the interest is innate and therefore universal.

**Instinctive interests.** It was the practice not too long ago for educators and psychologists to establish lists of "instinctive interests" which, on the basis of common sense, were supposed to be universally held by all human beings. One such list was presented in a textbook on teaching methodology printed in 1922. The author prefaced his list by stating that "these are called instinctive because they originate in certain human characteristics
which are inborn; that is, are not the result of experience." Here is the list of instinctive interests formulated by Farker:

1. Interest in adventure and romance.
2. Interest in actions of people and animals.
3. Desire for social approval.
4. Interest in rhythm, rime, jingle, and song.
5. Curiosity, wonder, puzzle interest, problem interest, mental activity.
6. Interest in expression and communication.
7. Manipulation and general physical activity.
9. Imitative play.
10. Interest in games.¹

The change in view that has taken place since 1922 may be illustrated by comparing this list of "instinctive interests" with the following statement made in 1941 by a person reviewing the literature on the subject:

"Again and again the literature on children's interests offers evidence of a belief that there is a basic pattern of interests which can be identified once and for all by the application of a proper device for locating them. Contrary to this popular belief on the part of teachers, there are no native or inherited interests in the specific sense. The human organism is so constituted biologically that it has the capacity to be interested in many things. In fact, it has to be interested or cease to exist. But that fact does not determine what the human organism will be interested in . . . What human-kind is interested in, the secondary interests involving attention and choice,

are determined fundamentally by what is available in any person's environment for him to become interested in.¹

Noting the wide differences in the physical, social and cultural environments in which people live, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the search to identify universal interests might well be replaced by the study of common interests, those which are shared by the members of specifically defined segments of particular cultures.

II. COMMON INTERESTS

The usual method by which the interests held in common by large numbers of people are identified, is to administer an interest test or questionnaire and to analyze the resulting findings.

Reviews of the Literature

Several reviews of studies of the interests of young people have been reported in the literature. Some of these are listed and briefly described below:


Reviews the literature as it relates to (1)

children's preferences in games, (2) reading interests, (3) radio interests, (4) motion-picture interests and (5) comics. Bibliography of 112 items.


Reviews the literature on sex differences in interests regarding: (1) plays, games and other activities, (2) reading and movie interests, (3) preferences for school subjects and (4) occupational interests. Extensive bibliography.


In addition to a general discussion of the topic of interest, reviews the field in the areas of: (1) identification of children's interests, (2) means of identifying children's interests, (3) utilization of children's interest in the curriculum and (4) the psychology of interest.


Sections of several articles in this work are devoted to the subject of interest. The following are representative:


Reviews studies of adolescent interest changes in reading, movies, radio, social activities, games, and future vocation.


Reviews studies of children's interests in poetry and the content of literature, and describes findings of other reviews of the literature interests of children.

This selected list of reviews indicates the kind of information that is available at present. It may serve as
a starting point for bibliographical research into the subject of student interest.

**Results of Studies**

The various studies of the interests held by young people have resulted in a wealth of findings. The first three reviews listed above have, for example, identified the qualities of interests in:

- Athletics
- Collecting things
- Composition writing
- Games
- Motion pictures
- Radio programs
- School subjects
- Social activities
- Vocational planning

One topic that has been frequently and intensively studied is that of reading interests. Gray indicates in his review that "at present (1949) approximately 300 published studies are available," the first of which having been conducted as early as the 1880's.\(^1\) Studies of reading interests have included analyses of interest in books, comics, newspapers, magazines and poetry.

Although a review of the findings of the various interest studies is beyond the scope of the present project, it may be of value to indicate the sort of generalizations that have emerged from this research. A section of Gray's

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review, subtitled "Interest in Reading," may serve to illustrate the breadth of such findings. Generalizing from seven reviews of the literature, he lists and discusses the following:\(^1\)

**Significant Facts Concerning Reading Interests and Preferences**

1. Trends can be identified in the extent of reading done by children.
2. Differences in the extent of newspaper and magazine reading indicate that the "secondary-school years form a critical period in respect to the reading habits of many young people."
3. General types of material preferred by young people have been identified.
4. Reading preferences differ widely at each age and grade level, but
5. Certain interests are more characteristic of pupils in some grades than in others.
6. Comparison of the interests of boys and girls indicate both similarities and differences.
7. Several points of view exist regarding the subject of children's interest in comics.
8. Some relationships appear to exist between interest and intelligence.
9. Studies of the quality and merit of what children read indicate that the level of such material might well be raised.
10. A relationship appears to exist between reading skills and interest.

**Factors and Conditions that Influence Reading Interests and Preferences**

1. The physical make-up of books.
2. Teacher preferences.
3. Training in standards for the selection of books.

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4. Training in comparing magazines.
5. Free reading programs.
6. Availability of books.
7. Training in recreational reading.
8. Difficulty in comprehension.
9. Motion picture viewing.
10. Radio listening.¹

As these findings indicate, survey studies provide a wealth of general information concerning various aspects of student interests. Moreover, they seem to indicate rather clearly that there are few interests which are universally held.

There seem to be several factors which are directly related to differences in interests, among which are age, sex, training and general environmental conditions. In regard to the last factor, it should be noted that unless one's environment contains such items as radio and television sets, it will be rather difficult for him to select program favorites.

**Limitations of Studies**

General surveys of young people's interests may be of practical value to teachers to the extent that they provide accurate information regarding the particular students with whom they are working. The crucial consider-

ation in employing the results of such studies is the question: "Are these findings related to the interests of my students?" Unfortunately, many of the findings concerning specific interests may not be too relevant.

Such factors as the characteristics of the population studied, the passage of time and the general conditions of testing may influence the relevance of research findings.

**Population.** When consulting the results of a study of student interests, one should note the characteristics of the population that has been employed; how it compares with one's own student population in regard to such factors as socio-economic background, intelligence, geographical location, school facilities and other such variables. If the population seems to be very different, this factor may have an important influence on the results achieved, making the value of their use in one's own situation rather uncertain.

The reports in the literature do not always clearly designate the character of the population studied. When this is the case there is sometimes little basis for assuming comparability of populations.

**Time factor.** As the world moves with the passage of time, from the age of horse-drawn carriages to that of
supersonic aviation and atomic energy, the student's environment changes, and with it his interests. New possibilities for the stimulation of interest appear and old ones fade away. In almost every area of interest that has been investigated, new developments are continually taking place—developments which influence interests. The appearance of a new medium such as television may affect a young person's radio and movie interests, to say nothing of his reading interests.

It would seem, therefore, that changes due to cultural acceleration tend to invalidate the usefulness of interest studies with the passage of time. Such studies may, indeed, have little bearing on the interests of even the same population after a rather short time interval. Interest studies may have historical significance in that they indicate what people consider to be their concerns at a certain time in history, but the same findings may have little value in providing a teacher with clearer understanding of the character of the interests of his own students at the present.

**Testing problems.** Aside from the above mentioned considerations, the general problems relating to testing may influence the usefulness of results. It is always appropriate to ask such questions as: Do the instruments that have been employed actually measure the full extent
of the interests they purport to study? How well have these instruments been constructed? How adequately have they been administered? How wisely have the findings been interpreted? All of these aspects of testing may have a part to play in determining the relevance of test results to the teacher's particular situation.

**Educational significance.** These considerations tend to indicate that the results of published studies may or may not be relevant to a teacher's students—or they may be relevant to a degree. Since the results of survey studies may not directly apply to one's situation, such findings must be employed with a good deal of caution. They should be taken as clues or hints as to what might be present in one's own predicament.

Survey studies may also suggest ways and means that may be employed by a teacher in case he desires to study his own students more closely. Indeed, in the final analysis, perhaps the quickest and most accurate way for a teacher to find out something about the interests held by the pupils in his classes is to conduct a study of his own.¹ It is not a difficult task and may have valuable results in addition to that of providing him with an opportunity to get to know his students better.

¹See "Study of One's Class," p. 175 below.
Such a study, when valid for a particular class, provides a picture of common student interests upon which the teacher may establish whole class or smaller group projects. It may also serve as a guide for the development of individual projects. Various ways in which a teacher may develop his curriculum taking interests into account are discussed in a later chapter.¹

III. INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS

So far, the discussion has been concerned with interests which are either universal or held in common by large numbers of persons. Interests have been viewed in the aggregate, in their statistical aspect.

Leaving such considerations, the discussion focuses now on the individual and his personal interests. Although it may frequently be convenient to speak about it in statistical terms, interest remains a personal psychological process—an aspect of the unique inner world of the individual.

The Characteristics of Individual Interests

As individuals vary in other respects, so too do they

¹See Chapter VI, "Student Interest and the Curriculum: Some Practical Considerations."
differ in their interests. Indeed, it seems possible that interests may provide a greater breadth of possibilities for variation than most other facets of personality.

Interests may vary in regard to any or all of the following variables (these categories are not necessarily exclusive): content, breadth, intensity, number, level of expression, degree of differentiation, time of appearance, duration and significance.

**Content.** The kinds of endeavor in which a person may become interested seem to be limited only by his capacity and the richness of his environment.\(^1\) In a complex contemporary society, the content possibilities may be almost limitless. A glance at the catalog of a moderately sized library will provide some idea of the content range of man's interests.

**Breadth.** The breadth of activity within any given content area in which people take interest may vary considerably. An interest in music may mean "taking piano lessons" to one person, while to another, it may include the study of operatic, symphonic and chamber music, as well as lecture and concert attendance, reading, record collect-

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\(^1\)See the section entitled "The Genesis of Interest," page 48.
ing and a number of other activities.

**Intensity.** What may be mildly interesting to one person may be all important and all encompassing to another. What some favor, others may abhor. The intensity of interest may vary so widely that it may be impossible at times for persons with diametrically opposed interests to believe in the reality of each other's interests.

Moreover, the same interest may have a different degree of intensity for the same person at different times. Also, the various interests held by a person at one time may vary in intensity.

**Number.** A person may have a number of different interests either at the same or at different times during his life's span and there may be little or no relation existing between them. Almost any number of combinations or permutations of interests may be possible. Moreover, the interests held by one person may vary in regard to each of the other factors in the present list.

**Level of expression.** Interests may differ also in the level at which they function. An interest in higher mathematics or atomic physics may find expression on a rather abstract mental level, whereas interests in athletics may achieve outlets on a more concrete physical level.
This is not to deny, of course, that the same person may possess interests in both mental and physical activities.

**Degree of differentiation.** Interests may differ in the degree to which they are differentiated psychologically. In this way, art may mean "looking at pictures" to one person, while it may, for another, refer to a searching analysis of such qualities of a painting as style, color, content, artist technique and historical significance. It is in this context that the terms "naive" and "sophisticated" may be employed in regard to one's interests.

**Time of appearance.** There is frequently little possibility of predicting the time at which an interest may make its appearance. One person may become interested in stamps in his eightieth year, while another may develop such an interest while attending grammar school. Moreover, an active interest may suddenly disappear, only to reappear years later with added emphasis.

**Duration.** Not only may the time of appearance be uncertain, but the duration of a given interest may also be indeterminate. Some interests may come and go within a short period of time while others may last a lifetime. Interest in such a recreational activity as photography may not last for an entire summer for one person, while it may be retained a lifetime by another.
Significance. The term "significance" may refer either to the function that an interest serves in a person's welfare or to its social value. Interests may differ in their significance on both of these levels; while certain interests may be rather shallow or insignificant, others may be of great importance to both the individual and society.

Confusion should be avoided in identifying significance with such characteristics of interest as breadth and variety. It may be quite possible for a person to possess many interests of different kinds while still not having a few of depth and significance which make life truly satisfying.

Individual Interests in Class

After considering some of the general characteristics of individual interests, it may be helpful to indicate the kinds of interests that a teacher might discover when he sets out to investigate the concerns of his students.

Instead of taking a census of all the interests that children might claim to hold, the present writer asked each child in his elementary school classes\(^1\) to select one interest which was of such importance to him that he would spend some time working on it each day during the school

\(^1\)Sixth, seventh and eighth grades.
term. The following are some of the topics which these students selected as interests worthy of attention over a protracted period of time:

Ballet
Movie stars
Sport personalities
Aviation
Home economics
Cowboys
Famous composers
Child actors
Automobiles
Queen Elizabeth II
Horses
Animals

It might be noted that the idea of a teacher showing concern for their unique individual interests came as something of a shock to these youngsters. It seemed almost incomprehensible to the students that a teacher might care about their interests and actually encourage them to work on their interests as part of the regular school program. Nevertheless, as the work continued, the feeling of strangeness wore off and the projects were engaged in with enthusiasm.¹

¹This particular project is more fully described on p. 178 below. See the section entitled, "Individual Interest Projects."
IV. The Life Theme Interests

A. The Nature of Life Theme Interests

At any moment during his lifetime, a person may have several different interests. However, if he is observed over a period of time, many of these interests may be found to be short lived. They remain of concern for a short time and are then forgotten.

There are other interests which have a greater lasting power. Over a period of time they tend not only to be retained but to expand in both their scope and importance. It is such persistent and significant interests that will here be termed "Life Theme Interests."

The words "life theme" are employed because such interests seem to have a central and crucial significance in determining the course of a person's life. They serve as cores around which the person's energies are expended. It is to these long term and deep interests that we make reference when we claim to "know a person," for they correspond to the major themes of his life.

General Utility of the Concept

Most human beings have many interests. Just to list the variety of items in which a person says he is interested may result in the accumulation of such a large number of interests that the investigator may gain little
understanding of the person as an integrated whole. As Fryer has indicated:

... Any estimation of the interests of an individual which does not delve deeper than a superficial expression by the subject... is doing little more than is the child who tries to collect all the pebbles on the beach and take them home with him. Interests are like the pebbles on the beach in number and variety.¹

However, when a person's interests are studied as a whole, it is sometimes possible to perceive one or several patterns taking form. When such patterns or themes tend to persist in time, they begin to show the characteristics of Life Theme Interests.

Murray has provided a description of such an interest, this time from an external psychological orientation:

... If we observe a series of objective episodes... occurring in the life of an individual, we never fail to notice certain resemblances. The personality exhibits sameness. We say that the man possesses certain consistent traits... Viewing successive episodes over a sufficient span of time we can note developments. We can perceive that some episodes are the logical outgrowths of others and that together they form temporal systems bound together by the persistence (constant repetition) of one or more needs integrated with certain modes and directed toward certain... objects... Every such system may be called an interest... ²


The concept of the Life Theme Interest may serve to
direct the attention of the investigator to the integrity
and interrelatedness of the psychological world of the
individual. Instead of being a number of unrelated items,
interests become evidence of an internal process which is
striving for wholeness.

Educational significance. Recognition of the
function of Life Theme interests may enable the educator to
widen his concept of interest. Instead of thinking of it
as a momentary phenomenon upon which the learning of
content may be pegged, interest may take on significance as
a central core around which personality develops. A piece-
meal or patchwork concept of interest may be replaced by a
longitudinal and developmental one.

Education, then, becomes concerned with the nurtur-
ing and growth of Life Theme Interests as a means through
which personality development may be achieved. A basis
for a continuity rather than a scattering of educational
experience is present.

The concept of "making subjects interesting" may
also gain new meaning. Subjects become really interesting
as they are perceived by the student as enabling him to
nurture and enrich his Life Theme Interests.¹

¹For an expansion of this point, see page 118 below.
Subject teachers are challenged to aid the growth of each student by broadening the range of his Life Theme Interests, by showing him how new material may be related intrinsically to the mass of learned subject matter which he may already feel to be of personal significance to him.\(^1\) "Meaningful learning," in this context, is the learning of subject matter which is perceived by the student to be significant to his well-being and growth because of its functional relationship to his Life Theme Interests.

**Types of Life Theme Interests**

A healthy individual may develop several different Life Theme Interests during the course of his life. A person may, for example, have one or more professional, recreational and artistic Life Theme Interests, each of which enables him to realize a different aspect of his personality.

At the same time, he may have a professional interest in education, a recreational interest in swimming and an artistic interest in music. Each of these Life Theme Interests may grow in significance and expand in breadth and differentiation with the passage of time.

Individuals may vary in regard to the content,

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\(^1\) See "Providing for Aroused Interest," page 196 below.
number and level of expression of their Life Theme Interests in the same way that they differ in regard to other individual interests.\(^1\) It is in terms of their persistance, intensity and significance that Life Theme Interests can be differentiated from other individual interests.

**Studying the General Nature of Life Theme Interests**

One way of studying the general nature of Life Theme Interests is through a retrospective looking back on the steps by which the interest took form. This can only be done, of course, after such an interest has become well differentiated.

A promising method of tracing the development of interests in retrospect lies in the analysis of personal documents, especially those of an autobiographical nature. Such study may throw light on the personal significance of Life Theme Interests in addition to providing information about their genesis, development and other general characteristics.

To illustrate this approach, quotations have been selected from the autobiographies of three persons, each of whom has made an important contribution to our cultural

\(^1\)See "The Characteristics of Individual Interests," page 72.
heritage. The selections, dealing as they do with childhood experiences, may illuminate aspects of the early developmental phases of Life Theme Interests.

Insights gained through the study of the general nature of Life Theme Interests may aid practitioners to identify and encourage these interests when they emerge in the lives of the young people with whom they work.

**Early Life Theme Interest of Benvenuto Cellini**

My father began teaching me to play upon the flute and sing by note; but notwithstanding I was of that tender age when little children are wont to take pastime in whistles and such toys, I had an inexpressible dislike for it, and played and sang only to obey him.¹

... his chief desire with regard to me was always that I should become a great performer on the flute. I for my part felt never more discontented than when he chose to talk to me about this scheme, and to tell me that, if I liked, he discerned in me such aptitude that I might become the best man in the world.²

... The Gonfaloner ... took much pleasure in making me chatter, and gave me comfits, and was wont to say to my father: "Maestro Giovanni, besides music, teach the boy those other arts which do you so much honour." To which my father answered: "I do not wish him to practise any art but playing and composing; for in this profession I hope to make him the greatest man of the world, if God prolongs his life." To these

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words one of the old counsellors made answer: "Ah! Maestro Giovanni, do what the Confalonier tells you! for why should he never become anything more than a good musician?"  

When my father spoke to me in the way I have above described, I entreated him to let me draw a certain fixed number of hours in the day; all the rest of my time I would give to music, only with the view of satisfying his desire. Upon this he said to me: "So then, you take no pleasure in playing?" To which I answered, "No!" because that art seemed too base in comparison with what I had in my own mind. My good father, driven to despair by this fixed idea of mine placed me in the workshop of ... Michel Agnolo, a goldsmith and a master excellent in that craft.  

When I reached the age of fifteen, I put myself against my father's will, to the goldsmith's trade with a man called Antonio ... My father would not let him give me wages like the other apprentices; for having taken up the study of this art to please myself, he wished me to indulge my whim for drawing to the full. I did so willingly enough; and that honest master of mine took marvellous delight in my performances ... My liking for the art was so great, or, I may truly say, my natural bias, both one and the other, that in a few months I caught up the good, nay, the best young craftsmen in our business, and began to reap the fruits of my labours. I did not, however, neglect to gratify my good father from time to time by playing on the flute or cornet. Each time he heard me, I used to make his tears fall accompanied with deep-drawn sighs of satisfaction. My filial piety often made me give him that contentment, and induce me to pretend that I enjoyed the music too.  

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3 Ibid., p. 15.
At that time I had a brother, younger by two years, a youth of extreme boldness and fierce temper. He afterwards became one of the great soldiers in the school of that marvellous general, Giovannino de' Medici.

... A certain pupil of my father's, moved by his own bad nature, suggested to the Cardinal that he ought to send me to Bologna, in order to learn to play well from a great master there...

When I reached Bologna, I put myself under a certain Maestro Ercole del Piffero, and began to earn something by my trade. In the meantime I used to go every day to take my music lesson, and in a few weeks made considerable progress in that accursed art. However I made still greater in my trade of goldsmith.

... It was our father's wish to make me, the elder, a great musician and composer, and him, the younger, a great and learned jurist. He could not, however, put force upon the inclinations of our nature, which directed me to the arts of design, and my brother, who had a fine and graceful person, to the profession of arms.

[Benvenuto had run away from home]... I made great progress in the one year that I stayed there, and completed several fine and valuable things in gold and silver, which inspired me with a resolute ambition to advance in my art.

My father, in the meanwhile, kept writing piteous entreaties that I should return to him; and in every letter bade me not to lose the music he had taught me with such trouble. On this, I suddenly gave up all wish to go back to him; so much did I hate that accursed music; and I felt as though of a truth I were in paradise the whole year I stayed at Pisa, where I never played the flute.


2Ibid., p. 17. 3Ibid., p. 20 4Ibid., p. 22.
Early Life Theme Interest of Isadora Duncan

I have to be thankful that when we were young my mother was poor. She could not afford servants or governesses for her children, and it is to this fact that I owe the spontaneous life which I had the opportunity to express as a child and never lost. My mother was a musician and taught music for a living and as she gave her lessons at the houses of her pupils she was away from home all day and for many hours in the evening. When I could escape from the prison of school, I was free. I could wander alone by the sea and follow my own fantasies. How I pity the children I see constantly protected and taken care of and smartly dressed. What chance of life have they? My mother was too busy to think of any dangers which might befall her children, and therefore my two brothers and I were free to follow our own vagabond impulses, which sometimes led us into adventures which, had our mother known of them, would have driven her wild with anxiety. Fortunately she was blissfully unconscious. I say fortunately for me, for it is certainly to this wild untrammelled life of my childhood that I owe the inspiration of the dance I created, which was but the expression of freedom. I was never subjected to the continual "don'ts" which it seems to me make children's lives a misery.

It seems to me that the general education a child receives at school is absolutely useless. I remember that in the classroom I was either considered amazingly intelligent and at the head of my class, or quite hopelessly stupid and at the bottom of the class. It all depended on a trick of memory and whether I had taken the trouble to memorize the subject we were given to learn. And I really had not the slightest idea what it was about. Whether I was at the head or the foot of the class, it was all to me a weary time in which I watched the clock until the hand pointed to three, and we were free. My real education came during the evenings when my mother played to us Beethoven, Schumann, Schubert, Mozart, Chopin or read aloud to us from Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats or Burns. These hours were to us enchanting.

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1Isadora Duncan, My Life (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1927), pp. 10-11.

I hope that schools have changed since I was a little girl. My memory of the teaching of the public schools is that it showed a brutal incomprehension of children. To a proud and sensitive child the public school system, as I remember it, was as humiliating as a penitentiary. I was always in revolt against it.

When I was about six years old, my mother came home one day and found that I had collected half a dozen babies of the neighbourhood—all of them too young to walk—and had them sitting before me on the floor while I was teaching them to wave their arms. When she asked the explanation of this, I informed her that it was my school of the dance. She was amused, and placing herself at the piano, she began to play for me. This school continued and became very popular. Later on, little girls of the neighbourhood came and their parents paid me a small sum to teach them. This was the beginning of what afterwards proved a very lucrative occupation.

When I was ten years old the classes were so large that I informed my mother that it was useless for me to go to school any more, as it was only a waste of time when I could be making money, which I considered far more important. I put up my hair on the top of my head and said that I was sixteen. As I was very tall for my age every one believed me. My sister Elizabeth, who was brought up by our grandmother, afterwards came to live with us and joined in the teaching of these classes. She became in great demand and taught in many houses of the wealthiest people in San Francisco.¹

Early Life Theme Interest of Henry Ford

It was life on the farm that drove me into devising ways and means to better transportation. I was born on July 30, 1863, on a farm at Dearborn, Michigan, and my

¹Isadora Duncan, My Life (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1927), pp. 13-14.
earliest recollection is that, considering the results, there was much too much work on the place. That is the way I still feel about farming.

There was too much hard hand labour on our own and all other farms of the time. Even when very young I suspected that much might somehow be done in a better way. That is what took me into mechanics—even though my mother always said that I was born a mechanic. I had a kind of workshop with odds and ends of metal for tools before I had anything else. In those days we did not have the toys of to-day; what we had were homemade. My toys were all tools—they still are! And every fragment of machinery was a treasure.

The biggest event of those early years was meeting with a road engine about eight miles out of Detroit one day when we were driving to town. I was then twelve years old. The second biggest event was getting a watch—which happened in the same year. I remember that engine as though I had seen it only yesterday, for it was the first vehicle other than horse-drawn that I had ever seen.

... It was that engine which took me into automotive transportation. I tried to make models of it, and some years later I did make one that ran very well, but from the time I saw that road engine as a boy of twelve right forward to to-day, my great interest has been in making a machine that would travel the roads. Driving to town I always had a pocket full of trinkets—nuts, washers, and odds and ends of machinery. Often I took a broken watch and tried to put it together. When I was thirteen I managed for the first time to put a watch together so that it would keep time. By the time I was fifteen I could do almost anything in watch repairing—although my tools were of the crudest. There is an immense amount to be learned simply by tinkering with things. It is not possible to learn from books how everything is made—and a real mechanic ought to know how nearly everything is made. Machines

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are to a mechanic what books are to a writer. He gets ideas from them, and if he has any brains he will apply those ideas.

From the beginning I never could work up much interest in the labour of farming. I wanted to have something to do with machinery. My father was not entirely in sympathy with my bent toward mechanics. He thought that I ought to be a farmer. When I left school at seventeen and became an apprentice in the machine shop of the Drydock Engine Works I was all but given up for lost.¹

Analyzing Personal Documents

In analyzing personal documents in order to explore the general nature of Life Theme Interests, it may be helpful to guide one's efforts with certain questions:

1. At what time in the person's life did the first signs of his Life Theme Interest appear? What were these first signs?

2. How did the persons with whom the individual came into contact react to his incipient interest? What were the attitudes of his parents, his friends, his teachers? How did the individual respond to these persons?

3. Did the person have to put up a struggle in order to occupy himself with his interest or did his environment facilitate his interest expression?

4. How did the individual react to those aspects of his surroundings which were not of interest to him?

5. Had the individual lived in a different cultural environment, would he have had the same Life Theme Interest?

The quotations which have been provided, dealing as they do with the lives of outstanding personalities, were selected in order to bring such issues into contrast. In the case of each of these persons, circumstances enabled them to nurture their Life Theme Interests. One might wonder how many other persons—with the same potential for making a contribution to society—may have been prevented from doing so because of environmental conditions which blocked and eventually destroyed their incipient Life Theme Interests.

B. Dealing With Life Theme Interests

It may be rather simple to study Life Theme Interests in retrospect, but how may a teacher identify such interests in the lives of his students and how might he encourage their growth and development? It is to the consideration of these questions that the discussion now moves.

Identifying Life Theme Interests in School

In studying the interests of students in one's class, it is possible to identify only those which are present at the time of the study.\(^1\) Although there seems no sure method by which the future significance of particular present interests may be predicted, the teacher may be able

\(^1\) See "Study of One's Class," p. 175 below.
to identify interests that have a Life Theme "flavor" about them.

Such qualities on the part of a student as singleness of purpose, the possession of aptitudes related to the area of his interest and a burning intensity of interest, may serve to foreshadow things to come. Any sign that the interest is expanding in breadth and significance with time may be an added indication.

A study of the student's personal documents may be of value in aiding the teacher to recognize incipient Life Theme Interests.\(^1\) Student compositions, especially when their topics are freely chosen, may be of special importance in giving clues to significant interests. The study of a student's free reading habits may also provide valuable information.

Since persistence is one of the principal characteristics of Life Theme Interests, the greater the time perspective the teacher can achieve, the more likely he may be to identify such interests. If the teacher has the opportunity to instruct the student for more than one term or if he is enabled to remain in contact with the youngster

\(^1\)An analysis of the use of personal documents is provided in Gordon W. Allport, *The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1942).
over a period of years, or if he is able to talk with the young person's family or friends, he may be able to identify emerging interests of special significance that might otherwise have been overlooked. Indeed, the better the teacher can get to know the youngster as an individual—the more he is able to find out about what is going on in the child's mind—the greater his chance of identifying such interests.  

It should be remembered that whatever interests are identified in the classroom remain potential Life Theme Interests. Only with the passage of time may they develop into such interests, assuming that circumstances permit them to survive and grow and that they are not replaced by even more significant interests.

**Encouraging the Development of Life Theme Interests**

If Life Theme Interests are to be encouraged, the teacher must work with whatever interests are present at the moment. As Smith has been quoted, "the apparently trivial but normal child interest must be accepted as the point of departure."\(^2\)

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\(^2\) See page 43.
As incipient interests are encouraged, some may be quickly satisfied and thereafter become inactive. It is those which persist, and instead of becoming dissipated, expand and grow in significance, that may eventually develop into Life Theme Interests.

In order for it to be successful, a program devoted to the encouragement of Life Theme Interests may have to continue over an extended period of time—perhaps throughout the entire course of the student's stay in school—and in addition, such a program might require a generous allotment of personnel and facilities. An outline of the kinds of activities that such a program might include is presented in a later chapter.¹

Vocational Guidance

The concept of the Life Theme Interest may throw the idea of vocational guidance into a new light.

Teachers who are concerned with the identification and nurturing of Life Theme Interests will, at the same time, be helping students to gain greater insight into their interests and to deal with them in an intelligent manner. By the time that the students are ready to leave school, they should be well on their way toward the selection of vocational outlets which have real significance to them. Their school

¹See "Nurturing Life Theme Interests," p. 202 below.
training will have provided them with the self-unders-
standing, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary in
order for them to locate rewarding and self-satisfying jobs.

Through the encouragement of Life Theme Interests, therefore, vocational guidance may become an ongoing process
taking place during the course of the young person's
schooling. Instead of something which is quickly accomplish-
ed as his graduation approaches, vocational guidance may
become an integral part of the student's total education.

C. The Personal and Social Significance of Nature Life

Theme Interests

Education is often thought of as preparation for the
future. In school, experiences are provided for young
people which will enable them to be better human beings and
finer citizens when they take their places as adults in
society. If the nurturing of Life Theme Interests is of
value, it should lead to future consequences of a desirable
nature; outcomes consistent with these objectives.

The Nature Life Theme Interest

A brief hypothetical sketch may help to focus the
discussion on both the personal and social significance of
mature Life Theme Interests. The characteristics of two
physicians, each of whom appears on the surface to be
equally qualified, will be described:
One is known to be vitally interested in medicine, indeed, his interest in this field can be traced to his childhood. He has had the opportunity to nurture his interest, allowing it to develop and expand with time to its present status as a mature professional life theme interest.

This doctor is a member and active participant in several professional organizations. He reads widely in the medical journals and attends post graduate courses of instruction whenever he has the opportunity. He is doing research in the area of his specialty and has written several reports on his findings.

The other man is best known for his interest in hunting. From his earliest days he has been an avid field and stream man, going on hunting outings whenever it was possible. Even today he is frequently noticed in hunting habit, with rifle slung over his shoulder. He is noted for his fine hunting dogs and his home is crowded with trophies.

This doctor has a fair store of medical knowledge, but there are times when his mind seems to wander. When a patient prolongs a session, he sometimes becomes a bit restless, as if he would rather be occupied in some other activity.

Although he is a member of one or two medical societies, he spends little of his free time attending professional meetings. He is not carrying on research at the present and claims that his various activities keep him so busy that such efforts on his part are out of the question.

In the case of a minor illness, one might choose either physician to care for the patient, but if the illness is more serious, the first man would appear to be the more sensible choice. The second doctor might be an excellent hunting companion, but from a professional point of view, he seems to lack one important qualification—a deep interest in his work.
Several questions may help to clarify this point. Supposing a student to have a vital interest in a particular subject, will he be more apt to select a course with an instructor who is interested or one who is uninterested in this subject? Will the average person prefer to eat in a restaurant in which the chef has a long-time interest in cooking, or a place where the chef has only a passing interest in his job? If one must fly across the ocean, will he prefer to fly with a pilot who is interested in his work or with one who is doing this job because he has nothing better to do?

Why is it, other things being equal, that in regard to professional competence, one will tend to select the person who is vitally interested in his work, that is, who has achieved a mature professional Life Theme Interest over another who has not?

The following are advanced as possible bases for the hypothesis that deep interest will be associated with professional competence:

1. The interested person will have his thoughts on what he is doing and will therefore probably be a more careful worker.

2. Since what he is doing is of importance to him, the interested person will probably exert himself to a greater degree.
3. The person who is deeply interested will probably be better trained for his job, due to his intrinsic desire to learn more about his field of endeavor. This may be reflected in off-the-job study as well as participation in "extra-curricular" activities related to his work.

4. The interested person, because of his highly motivated state, may be expected to develop a favorable attitude toward his work and therefore radiate a high degree of confidence.

All of these factors and others seem to indicate that the Nature Life Theme Interest is a matter of great social significance.

**Personal significance.** That Life Theme Interests have personal significance, has already been suggested in the sections of this chapter in which the concept was defined. Such interests give life real meaning by providing a central focus for the expression of the person's creative energy. They enable the individual to strive toward the fulfillment of his potentialities through their channeling of his efforts into outlets for self-expression. In a deep sense, the quality of a person's Life Theme Interests may determine the character of his personal well-being.
PART THREE

INTEREST ANALYZED
CHAPTER IV

SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF INTEREST

I. INTRODUCTION

In Part Two, an attempt was made to clarify the meaning of the word "interest." Having accomplished this task, it may now be possible to explore interest in terms of its significance to and employment in the educational process.

The present section, Part Three, examines interest from three angles, the psychological, the philosophical and the educational.

Chapter IV is concerned with the psychological aspects of interest. It attempts to open such questions as: What is the individual psychological significance of interest as process? In what way is interest related to learning? What relationship has interest to mental health? What is the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy interest?

Chapter V deals with interest and its relevance to the objectives of democratic philosophy. It attempts to explore such issues as: Why should interests be dealt with in school? What is the "democratic" way of dealing with interest? The relationship between respect for personality
and the way in which the school handles the interests of students. The chapters preceding Chapter V deal mainly with the question "what is interest?" In Chapter V, "why?" is considered.

In a way, Chapter VI is the core of the project. After discussions of what interest is and why it should be dealt with, this chapter deals with the question of "How?" It is concerned directly with the subject of the project as stated in the title; it explores ways in which student interests have been and may be related to the process and content of school experiences.

The present chapter, "Some Psychological aspects of Interest," has four objectives: (1) to indicate the basic concepts of the phenomenological psychological orientation; (2) to present the concept of interest within this framework; (3) to discuss interest as it relates to learning and (4) to discuss interest in its relationship to mental health. In connection with the discussion of mental health, the difference between healthy and unhealthy interests is explored. In each area, educational significance will be indicated.
II. A FRAME OF REFERENCE

"The world hath many centers, one for each created being, and about each one it lieth in its own circle. Thou standest but half an ell from me, yet about thee lieth a universe whose center I am not but thou art."  
Thomas Mann, Joseph In Egypt

The Phenomenal Field

In the phenomenological orientation, the principal concern is with the phenomenal field of the individual. This field may be defined as "the entire universe, including himself, as it is experienced by the individual at the instant of action." It encompasses the person's thoughts and beliefs concerning all things past, present and future. It is what is commonly termed "the mind," that which experiences one's surroundings. In other words, it is the subjective or conscious aspect of the human being.

It might be well here, to indicate through the use of a hypothetical illustration, what the phenomenal field

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1 Quoted in Prescott Lecky, Self-Consistency: A Theory of Personality (New York: Island Press, 1945), p. 76. This small volume is one of the pioneer endeavors in phenomenological theory and contains the germ of several concepts that have since been expanded by other authors.

2 Donald Snygg and Arthur W. Combs, Individual Behavior: A New Frame of Reference for Psychology (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), p. 15. This volume contains a clear presentation of phenomenological theory and has been used as the principal source of material presented in this chapter.
might be like in action. A situation which is close to the
teacher's experience has been selected—an average
elementary school class:

Each child has his textbook open to a page, upon
which is printed a list of questions. The teacher, who is
seated at her desk in the front of the room, is having the
children answer the questions orally. An observer is
seated in the rear of the room taking notes.

In order to gain a glimpse of the internal worlds of
the people present, it will be necessary to engage in a bit
of "mind reading."

Teacher: I wish the children would settle down, they seem
so restless today! How long will it take them to
learn to wait until I have recognized them with-
out calling out the answers? I do wish that they
were more interested in this subject! I wonder
what I can do to attract their attention?

Boy 1: I can hardly wait until three o'clock. My team is
going to have its first big baseball game of the
season and I'm going to pitch! I wonder if my arm
will feel alright? I hope I remember what the
catcher's signals mean. Let's see (writing on the
margin of the open page of his book) one finger
means "fast ball" . . .

Girl 1: Isn't Joan wearing a cute dress today? I wonder
when she bought it? I don't remember her telling
me that she was going shopping. I wish I had a
dress like that. Of course, the sleeves are a
little too long. Now if I were getting a dress
like that, I would make sure that the sleeves . . .

Boy 2: Doesn't the teacher look mean today? I'll bet
she's sore at somebody. I'd like to send a note
to Joe but I'd better not. When teacher looks
that way I'd better watch out. Remember what she
did to Joe last week when she had that same look!

Girl 2: Boy, I hope she doesn't call on me today! I was
watching TV late last night and I didn't do a bit
of homework! I think I'll raise my hand a few
times just so she will think I know the work.
She seems to be calling on the people who haven't got their hands raised.

Observer: I wonder how many children are following the lesson? Several of them seem to be daydreaming with their minds miles away. Why does the teacher ask the children to raise their hands if they know the answers and then call upon those children who haven't their hands raised? The teacher looks very tired—I wonder if she is coming down with a cold?

As is evident in this situation, each person has a constant stream of thoughts moving through his mind. Most of the children seem to be thinking of other things than the work at hand; their interests appear to lie in other directions. The teacher seems to sense this restlessness and is trying to think of some way to get their attention back on the class assignment; her aim is to get the children more interested. The observer realizes that all is not going too well and is searching for causes; his interest at the moment is the analysis of the situation before him.

The Source of Behavior

The individual's phenomenal field is deemed to be of central importance in understanding the logic of his behavior because "all behavior, without exception, is completely determined by and pertinent to the phenomenal field of the behaving organism."¹ In other words, what a

person does is determined in effect by his perceptions of the world in which he lives and the way in which they become organized into his internal psychological world.

An individual's behavior can be understood if it is viewed within the context of his phenomenal field organization. As Snygg and Combs phrase it:

... When we look at other people from an external, objective point of view their behavior may seem irrational because we do not experience the field as they do. Even our own behavior may in retrospect seem to have been silly or ineffective. But at the instant of behaving the actions of each person seem to him to be the best and most effective acts he can perform under the circumstances. If, at that instant, he knew how to behave more effectively he would do so.1

**Educational significance.** Because the behavior of students is determined by the organization of their phenomenal fields, teacher understanding of student actions may necessitate insight into the students' "internal worlds." There are probably few teachers who might not profit by deepening their understanding of student thinking.

A good many every day teacher actions are based upon assumptions about what is happening in the minds of students. No doubt, there are many occasions when such assumptions are not realistic.

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At times, a student's external behavior may be a rather poor indicator of the kind of learning, if any, that is actually taking place, for learning too, is a function of the individual's phenomenal field. As Dewey has noted:

... the exercise of will is not found in the external assumption of any posture; the formation of moral habit cannot be identified with ability to show up results at the demand of another. ... The question of educative training has not been touched until we know what the child has been internally occupied with, what the predominating direction of his attention, his feelings, his disposition has been while he has been engaged upon this task. If the task appeals to him merely as a task it is ... certain psychologically ... that the child is simply engaged in acquiring the habit of divided attention; that he is getting the ability to direct eye and ear, lips and mouth, to what is present before him so as to impress those things upon his memory, while at the same time he is setting his thoughts free to work upon matters of real interest to him.1

Since knowledge of the content of students' minus is of such great importance in gauging learning, the finding of methods by which such insight can be gained should be given high priority by the research bent teacher.

In this regard, the provision of opportunities for two-way communication between teacher and student should not be underestimated. When the teacher provides ample opportunities for students to speak (in group discussions, for example) he often becomes sensitized to misconceptions

or content "blind spots" which are very revealing, and may identify student attitudes toward content, teacher or school which may be quite unexpected.

As teachers take greater pains to explore the phenomenal fields of their students, there is little doubt that teaching of a higher quality will result.

The Significance of Self

Within the internal world of the person, the concept which he holds regarding himself is of great significance. As Snygg and Combs state it:

... Although behavior is always determined by the total phenomenal field, that portion of the field which the individual regards as part or characteristic of himself influences by far the majority of his behaviors. Since behavior is always a function of need satisfaction, it always has a personal reference in the phenomenal field. Those aspects of the phenomenal field having a specific reference to self, therefore, will be of paramount importance in understanding the individual's field and hence his behavior.

Part of the importance of the self-concept arises from the fact that it serves as a base in regard to which the person plans his activities. In relation to his self-concept, a person defines the roles which he will play. Indeed, the self-concept serves as a stabilizer; the person

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adjusting his behavior so that it is consistent with his picture of self.

In this way, a child's sex may serve as a base for its behavior. In deciding whether or not to attempt an activity, a youngster may reason thus: "I am a boy, (self-definition in regard to sex) boys don't play with dolls, therefore, I will not play with dolls."

A person's concept of his abilities is another part of his self-picture, which in turn, determines his behavior. An example of this would be the youngster whose self-concept contains the notion of "non-swimmer." Such a child will resist all efforts on the part of others to have him jump into deep water. However, if he learns how to swim, he will gradually change his self-concept, and with it his idea of where it is safe for him to swim.

Because interests are so closely related to self, all the factors which influence self-definition will affect the interests that the young person develops. As Harris has indicated:

The developmental status of a child, particularly with regard to the social roles he acquired, also affects the development of interests. As the child develops a concept of the self, that is, as he becomes aware of the roles he fulfills in the group . . . he may rule out certain activities or interests as inappropriate. Conversely, other interests are strengthened because they are seen by the child to fit the growing notion he has concerning himself . . . The child's emerging awareness of himself as a self
and the consequent expectations and demands he places upon his own behavior must affect the organization of his interest pattern.1

Self-Preservation and Enhancement

Snygg and Combs have suggested that the basic human need is "the preservation and enhancement of the phenomenal self,"2 and that all of behavior may be expressive of this motive. Although behavior may manifest itself in an almost infinite variety of ways, it may have at its source this single impulse to preserve and enhance the behaver's well-being.

Just as the lower organisms have an innate tendency to search for food, eliminate waste products and reproduce their kind, so too have the higher organisms their drive to serve their own well-being. In this respect, the conscious process of interest may be thought of as a highly sophisticated expression of the basic need of all living beings to continue life.3


The basic tendency to grow and fulfill one's being can be easily recognized on the physiological level;\textsuperscript{1} on the psychological level, however, the evidence is somewhat less conclusive. It should be noted, therefore, that the assumption of a basic motive on the part of the individual to strive for the maintenance and enhancement of his phenomenal self is at present only a hypothesis, although one which seems to be consistent with whatever partial evidence is now available.

III. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF INTEREST

\textbf{Interest and Behavior}

Interests play an important role in the individual's internal world, indeed, one of the principal characteristics of an interest is its tendency to pervade the figure aspect of the phenomenal field,\textsuperscript{2} It is for this reason--behavior being determined by the organization of one's phenomenal field--that a person tends to concern himself in both thought and action with the objects and endeavors in which he is interested.

\textsuperscript{1}See "Maturation Based Interests," p. 60 above.

\textsuperscript{2}See "Prominence of Interests in the Phenomenal Field," p. 28 above.
Interests and Self

Interests are aspects of a person's field of awareness which are perceived to be related to self; moreover, they are perceived as means through which self-maintenance and enhancement may be achieved.¹ The greater the perceived function of the interest in serving his well-being, the greater the person's motivation to concern himself actively with that object or endeavor.

As one's self becomes more deeply involved in his interest, the activity will take on a more intense emotional tone.² For this reason, deeply interested behavior is emotionally charged and may not be lightly interfered with or blocked; the person's self-enhancement and maintenance—his basic psychological objectives—lie in the balance.

Interest and Self-definition

Interests are intimately related to self and may in time become built into one's self-definition. In this manner, a person may find that listening to symphonic music gives him a feeling of deep satisfaction. As he comes to realize that music will contribute to his self-enhancement, he builds this concept consciously into his picture

¹See "Perceived Significance of Interests," p. 33.
²See "The Affective Aspect," p. 34, above.
of self, and thereafter thinks of himself as a person who is interested in music. Once he has added "music lover" to his self-concept, the person will tend to regulate his behavior accordingly. He may buy records, go to concerts or begin the formal study of music.

Moreover, it would appear that the more mature or well-developed one's interests, the more clearly differentiated one's picture of self will be. A well-defined Life Theme Interest may, in this manner, serve to clarify a person's self-picture, thereby enabling him to focus his energies with greater precision into activities that serve his personal welfare.

**Interest and Insight into Self**

As an individual explores his environment and identifies interests, he will, at the same time, be defining his concept of self. Indeed, the depth of self-insight which one is able to achieve may depend in large measure upon his success in locating interests of deep personal significance. As Jersild and Tasch have noted:

... the richer the opportunities, the more likely it is that the person will find a way of acquiring interests which are best suited to his particular gifts and which will be most serviceable to him. ... [This view enables us to] look upon interests not primarily as aids or guides to learning but as forms of experience through which the child discovers and realizes the resources of his nature. ... Through the process of developing interests that are in keeping with his
particular qualities and abilities the child is helped to acquire a conception of himself that is in line with reality.¹

A reciprocal relationship would appear to exist between a person's self-insight and his ability to identify interests. As the individual explores areas of interest, he tends to open up aspects of himself which may have been hitherto unknown to him. On the other hand, the clearer his knowledge of the intricacies of his self, the more able he will be to identify interests of significance.

This reciprocal process seems also to have its negative side. Consider, for example, the person having few interests; the individual who seems to have nothing to do and is, therefore, bored with his existence. Having had little opportunity to identify interests of significance, he has no way of gauging his potentialities; and having little insight into his self and its possibilities, he has great difficulty in knowing what kinds of activities he might find interesting. Due to his poorly defined picture of self, such a person's behavior may be scattered in many directions with his efforts at self-preservation and enhancement leading only to frustration. It is such a negative circular

process which may eventually lead to the emergence of unhealthy interests and anti-social behavior. ¹

**Educational significance.** The provision of wide opportunities for the location of new interests as well as the encouragement of interests once they have been located, are two ways in which the school may help students to gain insight into their varied potentialities.

It would seem to be part of the school's responsibility to provide an educative environment so rich in both content and encouragement that every child—regardless of the extent of his capacities—might be enabled to locate some interests which will facilitate his growth in self-understanding. The values of such an educational program are well-stated by Jersild and Tasch, when they conclude:

... the supplying of as many means as possible through which children may discover and realize their potential interests is not a luxury, and it certainly is not a way of diluting or sugar-coating education. When we take education literally and seek to educate, to draw forth in the most constructive manner, the resources with which children are by nature endowed, we are not simply helping them to have a good time. We are making a fundamental investment in human welfare.²

¹See "The Unhealthy Interest," p. 135 below.

IV. LEARNING

In this section, the relationship between interest and learning will be explored. The discussion includes consideration of the concepts of readiness and motivation— intrinsic and extrinsic.

The Natural Impulse To Learn

In order to achieve his goal of self-preservation and enhancement, the individual has to accomplish a good deal of learning. This learning enables him to survive in an environment which remains hostile and unrewarding until it is manipulated in terms of his needs. Learning of this type is spontaneous and intrinsically motivated, for it is a direct expression of the natural process by which life is sustained.

The history of civilization is the story of man's ever increasing understanding based on learning and his resulting greater ability to manipulate his environment more effectively in order to satisfy his various needs. This natural learning process is represented by four steps of logical inquiry in which man identifies his needs, searches his environment for the means by which they may be satisfied, invents or develops skills to accomplish his task and finally takes the necessary steps to achieve his objective.
Educational significance. Learning being a natural process, it is often puzzling to note how unproductive and indeed, unpleasant many so-called learning situations turn out to be under examination. Whereas one might expect schools to be fascinating places in which young people are encouraged to take advantage of their natural predisposition to learn material which is of perceived value to them, this seems often not to be the case.

When the child starts school he is frequently highly motivated, but his school experiences often tend to dampen rather than to encourage his natural inclination to learn. As one educator expressed her feelings upon this subject:

... What I did have was a deep conviction ... that a desire to learn was as natural and inevitable in children as the desire to walk in babies ... .

But something happens, alas, to this great driving force. All but a very few men and women in the world, a few unique beings touched with some kind of genius, have lost the urge to learn.

They lost it, in fact, long before they were grown. They lost it while they were still little children, while they were still spending their days in the place of learning, the school—perhaps that was where they lost it... .

... It seemed to me that if we could keep this desire alive through childhood and into adult life, we would release a force more precious and powerful for good than any physical force the scientists ever discovered for mankind's use.  

Readiness

Psychological readiness is present when an individual has a conscious need that he desires to satisfy. He is prepared, the physiological and psychological conditions are right for certain activities to be engaged in and for certain learnings to take place.

The concept of readiness may be usefully employed in connection with interest, for interest is often an indication of the presence of readiness. Just as a person's interest in putting his emerging physiological potentialities to use may indicate a readiness for physical growth, so may intellectual interest in a certain matter indicate a readiness for psychological growth. Interest, as it relates to knowledge and skills, may be thought of as evidence that a young person is ready to achieve growth through learning.

If that for which he is ready is made available to him at the time of his readiness, the student will tend to concern himself with it, and in so doing, to learn it. If, on the other hand, the object of interest is withheld or denied, the student need will be unsatisfied and he may develop feelings of unhappiness and frustration, which may

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1See "Maturation Based Interests," p. 60 above.
eventually result in the learning of negative attitudes toward the subject in particular and schooling in general.

When interest is denied an outlet for expression, the individual's readiness is violated and an opportunity for intrinsically motivated learning is ignored. Indeed, a conscious need for growth on the part of the student is denied satisfaction.

Motivation

Because people are basically moved or motivated to maintain and enhance their phenomenal selves, activities which serve to further these ends will tend to engage their attention and energy. Objects and endeavors which are perceived to function in this respect have been defined as interests. It therefore follows that persons are motivated to concern themselves with their interests. When the activity related to the interest serves directly to maintain and enhance a person's phenomenal self, the activity may be described as being intrinsically motivated.

The more significant the interest, the stronger its motivating power may be. In practice this might mean that a person who is deeply interested in an activity may spend long hours and a good deal of his vital energies concerned with it, to the exclusion of other activities which are of lesser or no interest to him.
Intrinsically motivated activity is satisfying and self-fulfilling; it is of worth in its own right—something to be highly valued and eagerly sought. Effort that is expended in such activity is offered gladly because of the rich reward in intrinsic satisfaction which accompanies it. Such effort is often described as "the labor of love" for it is in itself so enjoyable that it is hardly recognized as being work.

Activity in which a person is giving expression to a Life Theme Interest is perhaps the epitome of intrinsically motivated behavior. As the individual occupies himself with such an endeavor, he is achieving satisfaction of his innermost strivings for self-realization, a deeply gratifying experience.

**Educational significance.** When the subject matter to be learned is perceived by the student as being significant to his own well-being, that is, of interest, he will tend to concern himself with it. If, on the other hand, the material is not of perceived import, the student will not be intrinsically motivated to deal with it and learning which takes place must be motivated by some other factor extraneous to the material itself—unless of course, the material may be "made interesting."
The Desirability of Intrinsic Motivation

Although it may be easily assumed that intrinsic motivation is desirable, there is no unanimity on this view. Indeed, there is a rather strong feeling held by some, that intrinsic motivation is incompatible with the objective of getting necessary work done. This belief seems to rest upon the assumption that the work of the world is basically uninteresting and can only be accomplished through the employment of extrinsic motives.

In educational discourse, this same argument is frequently presented to support teaching methods employing extrinsic motivation. It is often expressed in these words: "When the youngster gets out into the world, he will be forced to engage in activities that are not interesting to him. He might, therefore, just as well learn to apply himself to uninteresting matter while in school, even if the learning of such subject matter may require extrinsic motivation."

Whether or not the work of the world is basically uninteresting, can only be decided on the basis of research. Nevertheless, clinical evidence seems to suggest that intrinsically interesting activity can be defended on its own merits, especially in so far as it contributes to mental health and well-being.
That the human significance of intrinsic motivation is often overlooked or not recognised as an important consideration is suggested by the following statement by Thorndike:

If by a miracle the learning and work which the world now gets done by social forces acting upon individuals from outside ... could be done from intrinsic interest, each person's inner choices harmonizing perfectly with his allotted duties in an automatic paradise, the world would ... be much happier; but it is not likely that either the work or the learning would get done in one-tenth the time now taken, or in a quarter of it, or in a third of it ... Man can learn and do what he wants to learn and do whether he likes it or not. How well he likes it does matter, but on the whole as a minor factor.

Making Subject Matter Interesting

If the matter to be learned is in itself of potential interest, that is, if it is potentially of service to the student in maintaining and enhancing his phenomenal self, it becomes the teacher's task to enable the student to see that such a relationship exists.

The student may not, for instance, perceive reading as having significance in contributing to his well-being. If the teacher is able to show him how reading may enable him to accomplish his personal goals, the student may

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2See also, p. 167 below.
thereafter develop an interest in reading.

It should be noted that this strategy is based upon the assumption that the material or skill to be learned is actually of potential interest to the student. If there is no such relationship, the plan will not work.

There may well be subject matter in the curriculum which does not possess the qualities which cause it to be of perceived value to the student. If the school considers it important for the student to learn such material regardless of this fact, other means of motivating learning must be found. Such subject matter, is, in itself, neither interesting nor potentially interesting to the student, and the greatest effort on the part of the teacher can not make it so.

**Extrinsic Motivation**

If it is impossible to get the student interested in learning what he is required to learn, then extrinsic methods, that is, methods employing extrinsic motivation must be employed. In this case, the student is motivated to learn a given amount of subject matter because of his interest in some other thing which is offered to him as a reward if he will learn the uninteresting matter.

The student's interest lies in the function of the other, the extrinsic matter, in maintaining and enhancing
his phenomenal self, and not in the subject to be learned, which is merely a means toward achieving the other end.

Such rewards as good marks, praise, honors and special privileges are frequently employed in the process of extrinsic motivation. If the student desires these things, he may learn the required subject matter in order to attain them; if he does not, he may have little reason to learn. When the usual rewards do not work, the student may turn his energy to other pursuits, which may, at times, be somewhat disturbing to the orderly functioning of his class. Such a student frequently becomes known as a "problem."

When the subject matter is uninteresting and extrinsic motivation fails, there is indeed a problem; but one which may not necessarily be the "fault" of the student.

Some Consequences of Extrinsic Motivation

When school subject matter is regarded as a means toward extrinsic ends, rather than something of worth in itself, the student may develop certain unique reactions toward the whole idea of education.

Attitudes toward education. Since the subject matter is perceived as being worthless in its own right, time spent in learning it is considered by the student to be time wasted. This notion of the meaninglessness of school activities may result in the formation of negative
attitudes toward schooling which may be carried into later life.

Such a negative attitude regarding school work may result in the young person never again wanting to open a book or to continue his studies in any way once his formal schooling has ended. In effect, he may become soured on "school learning" and want no more of it than is absolutely essential in order for him to get away from it by graduating.

**Attitude toward work.** The student's idea of the worthlessness of subject matter may also affect his general attitude toward work after he leaves school. He may come to think of his daily efforts as being essentially distasteful and unrewarding occupations in which he engages only because they serve as means to another end, namely, the making of money. Any idea that his work may be meaningful and satisfying in its own right may be eliminated from the realm of possibility.

**Student behavior.** Extrinsic motivation may also affect the general behavior of students. Since students are actually working for rewards which have little to do with the subject matter at hand, they might find it more reasonable to bypass the subject matter to receive the reward. Cheating and other devious practices may have
their origin in this way.

If the student finds that his class activities provide few if any means by which he may achieve self-enhancement, he may search for them elsewhere. In this way, the non-scholar may "give up" in his academic studies and exert his greatest energy in making a success of himself in some other area, perhaps that of athletics. The more academic student may, on the other hand, merely exert enough effort in order to get passing marks and then throw himself completely into the so-called "highbrow" extra-curricular activities.

Indeed, it may well be in the area of extra-curricular activities where the greatest proportion of intrinsically motivated learning within the walls of some schools actually takes place. It is sometimes amazing, for instance, to note how many complicated directions the school athlete is able to learn because of his interest in his team performance, whereas he may seem to be completely "hopeless" when it comes to learning the uninteresting subject matter in his classes.

Influence upon learning. Extrinsic motivation also takes its toll on the quality of learning which takes place.

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1Another reaction may be a complete turning away from school to seek interest outlets elsewhere, see p. 45.
The subject matter being perceived to be valueless in itself, there may be a general tendency for students to do only as much work as they must in order to get by. They may have no desire to do "outside work" and the level of learning that does take place may be far from adequate. In addition, since the material is not of significance to the learners, it may be expected that what is learned may be quickly forgotten. Indeed, the students have little reason to retain such material, for in their eyes it has little worth in forwarding their own ends.

V. MENTAL HEALTH

The democratic philosophy, having the individual as its supreme value, focuses attention on a primary educational objective, the greatest well-being of each individual human being. In psychological terms, the state of individual well-being is often referred to as "mental health." In the present section, several aspects of this concept are discussed with special emphasis on the role that interest plays in fostering mental health.

Just as physical health is a dynamic concept which may be defined in terms of such processes as growth, fulfilment of potentialities and the proper functioning of the

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1 See Chapter V, "Interest and Some Democratic Objectives."
organism as a whole, so too is mental health. As Fromm has indicated:

... the normal individual possesses in himself the tendency to develop, to grow, and to be productive, and ... the paralysis of this tendency is in itself the symptom of mental sickness. Mental health, like physical health, is not an aim to which the individual must be forced from the outside but one the incentive for which is in the individual and the suppression of which requires strong environmental forces operating against him.¹

In Fromm's conception, the human being is seen to be internally motivated toward the actualization of his potentialities. The expression of this active striving for self-realization is in itself a condition of mental health. This concept may be likened to that already presented² which envisioned a basic human drive toward self-preservation and enhancement.

Combining these formulations, mental health may be conceived of as the psychological state of the individual who is successfully achieving an adequate degree of self-enhancement by virtue of the various activities in which he is engaged. It is a dynamic condition in which the person grows in the direction of ever greater fulfillment of his human potentialities.


²See p. 108 above.


Interest and Mental Health

In the following discussion, interest will be seen to influence a person's self-insight, his knowledge of the environment in which he lives, his skill in manipulating his environment in order to serve his own ends, and his attitude towards himself. It is the quality of such factors as these which contributes to the individual's ability to satisfy his basic objectives of self-preservation and enhancement and thereby his mental health.

Self-Insight

In order for a person to function effectively, he must base his behavior on a self-concept which is realistic; one which has validity in terms of his potentialities and capacities. Indeed, the extent to which a person's varied potentialities find expression and fulfilment during his lifetime may be largely dependent upon the depth of insight he can achieve concerning his present and potential capabilities.

All too often, individuals develop pictures of themselves which are inadequate. Such self-concepts may be limited or distorted to such an extent that the person is partially or totally unable to understand his real needs.

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\(^1\)See also "Interest and Self-Definition" and "Interest and Insight into Self," p. 110 and p. 111 above.
and is, therefore, helpless in his attempt to achieve a satisfactory degree of self-enhancement.

One's active participation in the identification of new interests and his efforts to develop and expand those which he has already identified, may enable a person to define and redefine his concept of self. As Jersild has noted:

... Through the process of developing interests that are in keeping with his particular qualities and abilities the child is helped to acquire a conception of himself that is in line with reality.

The richer the individual's environment, the greater the possibility that he will identify interests of significance and thereby gain a deeper and more realistic insight into his potentialities.

The more significant a person's interests, the more likely they may be to influence his self-definition. Life Theme Interests, by virtue of their depth of personal significance may, indeed, serve to establish the basic framework of an individual's self-concept.

Just as an outsider may come to know a person through his continuing concern with his Life Theme Interests, so may the individual himself gain a great depth of

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personal understanding through such involvement. The degree of self-fulfilment he may be able to realize by concerning himself with such interests may enable the individual to appreciate, to an ever increasing degree, his own unique potentialities. Having a high degree of self-insight, the person with well developed Life Theme Interests may be secure in his knowledge of what endeavors will lead to his ever expanding self-enhancement.

Providing a student with a rich environment in which he is able to identify new interests and allowing him to occupy himself with his interests once they have been identified, in the hope that they may grow into Life Theme Interests, are two educational endeavors which may result in greater self-understanding on the part of the student and thereby contribute to his mental health.

Knowledge of One's Environment

As a person gains greater insight, he is impelled to explore his environment in order to identify the specific means by which he may achieve self-fulfilment. In other words, he is intrinsically motivated to identify objects of interest in his surroundings, especially those which are of deep significance to him. Once he has identified such interests, the person is then driven to find means by which they may be adequately expressed.
Since a person's drive to explore his environment may be guided to a large extent by his interests, it would seem that the depth of knowledge which a person achieves concerning his environment may depend ultimately on the quality of his interests. Efforts on the part of educators to increase the number and scope of youngsters' interests may have the indirect effect, therefore, of enabling students to gain greater knowledge of the world.

As young people come to realize that their environment offers a rich store of possibilities which may enable them to fulfill their varied potentialities, they may gain a feeling of relatedness or "at homeness," a sense of security in their surroundings which may contribute appreciably to their mental well-being.

The environmental possibilities from which subject matter may be selected are almost infinite in their extent. The educator is faced with the problem of choosing a certain limited amount of this material for instructional purposes. If it is of value to teach subject matter which is of significance to students, material which may enable them to achieve security in their surroundings, then student interests, both present and potential may have to be considered as important data upon which the selection of subject
matter is based.\footnote{See "Student Interests and the Selection of Subject Matter," p. 170 below.} If the development of life theme interests is accepted as an educational objective, present student interests must play an important role in the selection of the material to be taught.\footnote{See "Encouraging the Development of Life Theme Interests," p. 92 above.}

**Skills for Manipulating One's Environment**

To take advantage of the potentialities of one's environment, it is often necessary to develop rather complex skills. A person having an aptitude for music may, for instance, identify an instrument, the mastery of which can lead to his self-enhancement (through the development and expression of his inherent potentialities). Unless he is able to gain skill in playing the instrument, however, his potentialities will not find an outlet for expression.

It is not sufficient, therefore, merely to have identified an interest on one's part or to have found an environmental outlet for its satisfaction. In addition, one must possess the skills by means of which the interest may be expressed.

Skills have little meaning in themselves. It is only as they enable a person to involve himself with his interests and thereby achieve self-enhancement that they gain
significance. Because of this, instruction in basic skills may be achieved more efficiently if it can be tied in with work on student interests. Students may find the learning of basic skills less painful, indeed enjoyable, if they can do it naturally while engaged in interesting school activities.

Although there may be certain basic skills which have a potential function for all persons, many of the skilled procedures in this complex industrial age are associated with rather limited activities. It would seem reasonable, therefore, for such skills to be taught only to those persons who will have an opportunity to put them to use.

In this respect, the earlier a young person is able to identify and start working on Life Theme Interests, the earlier he will be able to acquire the specific skills necessary for him to carry on his particular vocation or avocation. To deprive a youngster of the opportunity to learn skills in areas in which he is deeply interested may result in limiting the future quality of his Life Theme Interests, thereby doing damage to both his psychological and professional well-being.

**Self-Confidence**

In addition to the factors of self-insight, knowledge of one's environment and the requisite skills, a
person must also possess an attitude toward himself which allows him to take the action which seems to him to be necessary. This attitude can be summed up in the words, "self-confidence."

Within this concept is contained a conviction on the part of the person that he has the ability to act in terms of his interests and also the belief that it is both right and proper for him to do so. In other words, the person has confidence in his perceptions of what activities will be to his own benefit, in his ability to take such action, and in his judgment that such steps are justified.  

A person's self-confidence may be closely related to the other three factors, indeed, it might be hypothesized that a person's self-confidence is directly influenced by his depth of self-insight and the breadth of his knowledge and skills concerning his environment. Efforts on the part of the school to encourage students to identify and express significant interests may serve to enhance young people's feelings of security in their own abilities and therefore, their general psychological well-being.

Self-Respect

As one's confidence in himself and his feelings

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1 For a consideration of the way in which self-confidence may be damaged by the blocking of interest expression, see p. 43 above.
increases, a person may become better able to achieve adequate self-enhancement, a condition already described as being the fundamental quality of mental health. The greater self-realization possible in one's ever expanding ability to live a full and satisfying life may, in turn, enable the person to grow in his basic feelings of self-respect.

Having learned to base his behavior on realistic estimates of his own capabilities and of the possibilities available in the environment in which he lives, the person will tend to be successful in his various undertakings. Such success may stimulate an attitude of respect for his own capacities which may be carried over into his attitudes toward others.

It is in this way that the democratic imperative of respect for personality may "begin at home"; the person's high level of self-confidence and self-respect permit him to respect the "selves" of others. It would seem highly unlikely that a person who is unable to achieve an adequate degree of self-regard will be capable of showing a high level of respect for the personalities of others.

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1 See page 126 above.
VI. THE UNHEALTHY INTEREST

In the section above, interest has been described in positive terms as a process which enables the individual to serve his own growth and well-being. It was noted that the degree to which a person is able to achieve such well-being depends in part upon such factors as his depth of self-insight and his knowledge and skills in relation to his environment. As the quality of these factors is enhanced, so too is the individual's ability to select interests that enable him to achieve healthy self-enhancement.

If, because of deficiencies in his environment, these factors are of low quality, the person may, in his efforts to achieve self-enhancement, focus his attention upon endeavors or interests which work to his disservice. It is with the discussion of such undesirable interests that the present section is concerned.

The Unhealthy Interest

In terms of the individual, just as healthy interests may enable him to achieve self-enhancement and the fulfillment of his potentialities, so unhealthy interests may have just the opposite effect, that of doing damage to his well-being by blocking his growth and by limiting the development of his personality. It is the function which an interest serves in the individual's welfare that is the
personal criterion by which the "health" of an interest can be determined.

Evaluating interests. It may be easier to identify the function of certain interests in a person's well-being than it is of others. Interests in the physiological realm may, for instance, be rather clear-cut in their influence on a person's health. The physician has provided rather clear concepts of the general nature of physical health which may be employed as criteria. If an individual has an interest relating to his health which moves him in the direction of the criteria set by the medical authorities, he may be considered to have a "healthy" (i.e., physical health producing) interest. If on the other hand, his interest leads to illness and disease, it may be thought of as an "unhealthy" (i.e., illness producing) interest.

In the psychological realm, it is somewhat more difficult to develop criteria of health. However, as the concept of mental health becomes more clearly defined, the task of making judgments concerning the functional value of specific interests may be expected to become progressively easier.

Educational significance. Since the criteria of mental health are not too clearly defined at this time, the teacher is thrown more or less upon his own judgment
when it comes to making distinctions between healthy and unhealthy interests on the part of his students. Unless the teacher has definite evidence which causes him to believe that an interest will eventuate in harm for the student, he must be extremely cautious in discouraging it, for it may well serve a healthy purpose.

One way in which a teacher may determine the function of a particular interest in the life of a student is for him to explore the student's total situation. If the teacher can obtain information concerning the student's life as a whole, taking into consideration its various facets, his judgments regarding the function of specific interests may achieve a high degree of validity.¹

As teachers bring individual pupils and their unique interests into closer focus, interests which on the surface may have appeared to be undesirable, may be discovered actually to serve the students' well-being.

The Sources of Unhealthy Interests

All interests, unhealthy as well as healthy, probably have at their base the individual's drive for

¹One means of gaining such perspective is to observe a person over an extended period of time. For an intriguing description of a study in which a young boy was carefully observed for an entire day, see Roger G. Barker and Herbert F. Wright, One Boy's Day: A Specimen Record of Behavior (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951).
self-preservation and enhancement. If one’s environment is rich in opportunities that are conducive to the identi-
ification and nurturing of healthy interests, all may go well; it is when one’s surroundings are lacking of such possibilities, that difficulties may arise. When an individual is unable to locate healthy interests—perhaps because of deficiencies in his environment—he may grasp at whatever opportunities happen to be available in order to gain self-enhancement. At such times, the individual may seize upon activities which are unhealthy in character.

The interest vacuum. When the school and the home are either unable or unwilling to help the young person find and develop healthy interests, or when their actions tend to block interests which do emerge, the youngster may be left to shift for himself in finding outlets by means of which he may achieve some measure of self-enhancement. The young-person, finding boredom intolerable, may turn to whatever elements happen to be present in his environment in order to have “something interesting to do.”

In this context, the many hours spent by youngsters reading comic books, listening to the radio, watching television and attending the movies may be readily understood. Such activities may not be engaged in necessarily because they are interesting in themselves, (of course
there are exceptions) but rather, because they serve to fill an otherwise unpleasant interest lack or "vacuum" in the lives of these young people.

When a youngster exists in such an interest vacuum, he is not only forced to waste his time in the present, but he is also deprived of the opportunity of building interests for future use. When this happens, a childhood and adolescence of boredom may be extended into an adulthood of the same character. The person lacking opportunities to develop Life Theme Interests in his youth may develop into an adult who is devoid of satisfactory outlets for his energy, whether vocational or otherwise. As Jersild and Tasch have noted:

When a child fails, for lack of stimulus or opportunity, to acquire certain interests, he may be penalized throughout life. The interests a person cultivates and enjoys as an adult are likely to be influenced by what he learned as a child . . . . Failure to acquire an interest in childhood may, in other words, leave lasting gaps.

If the possession of significant interests is a factor contributing to and expressive of mental health, the person who exists in an interest vacuum may be in a somewhat unhealthy condition. At such a time, the stage may be set for the location and development of unhealthy interests.

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Developing unhealthy interests. When a youngster is left to his own devices, he may be lucky enough to chance upon a healthy interest which may, in effect, "save his life"; indeed, this probably happens in a good many cases. However, it is equally likely that in "looking for something interesting to do," he may focus his attention upon an endeavor of an unhealthy nature. In this way, a young person may take to driving a "hot-rod" car at high speeds or to experimenting with criminal behavior.

It is probably true that youngsters frequently select unhealthy activities because the elements for these endeavors are the only ones that they are able to recognize in their surroundings which appear to offer them an opportunity to achieve some degree of self-enhancement. They select such interests by default, for society has failed to provide them with an environment in which they might have been able to locate and develop healthy interests.

Psychological factors. Unhealthy interests may also have their roots in states of mental disturbance on the part of the person concerned. In this manner, an individual having sadistic tendencies may develop an interest in crimes of violence while another having a persecution complex may nurture an interest in the use of firearms. Even in these cases, however, the interests that are chosen may seem to
the persons concerned to offer outlets through which self-
preservation and enhancement may be achieved.

The blocking of healthy development may be another
factor in the origin of unhealthy interests. In the words
of Fromm:

... If life's tendency to grow, to be lived, is
thwarted, the energy thus blocked undergoes a process
of change and is transformed into life destructive
energy. Destructiveness is the outcome of unlived
life.¹

Such destructiveness may find an outlet through the devel-
opment of unhealthy interests. It may also find expression
in anti-social behavior, as will be noted below.

**Educational significance.** In dealing with unhealthy
interests within the school context, it is frequently
suggested that a strong frontal approach is the only answer.
Such interests should, according to this point of view, be
summarily dealt with by every means that can be brought to
bear. If the campaign is powerful enough, if the punish-
ments are adequately severe, then such interests will be
uprooted and finally discouraged.

Although it might be unwise not to attempt to dis-
courage unhealthy interests when they arise, this may not

¹Erich Fromm, *For Karl For Himself: An Inquiry into the
Psychology of Ethios* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1947),
p. 216.
be the most effective way of dealing with them. If the above discussion of the origin of unhealthy interests has validity, then a positive approach might offer even greater promise as a solution.

Since interest is basically a positive force on the part of the young person—a striving to come to a favorable relationship with his environment—it might be suggested that the school should widen its efforts to encourage young people to find and work with interests of significance. It may well be more important to encourage the development and nurturing of healthy interests than to overly emphasise the discouragement of negative, unhealthy ones. In the long run, as seems to be the case in the field of medicine, preventive measures which foster health from the start may have greater long term significance than therapeutic ones which deal with sickness after it has occurred—although both types of measures are probably necessary.

When a child goes through a course of study at school and emerges with unhealthy interests, it is not because the school has taught him such interests, rather it may be because the school has failed to reach him and help him to develop healthy, growth producing interests. The school's responsibility in this respect seems clear.
The Anti-Social Interest

In addition to the criterion of personal well-being, interests may also be evaluated in terms of their social significance. Just as the expression of certain interests may contribute to the well-being and enrichment of society, so other interests, of an anti-social nature, may serve to destroy the institutions of the community. The criminal with an unhealthy Life Theme Interest in crime may, for example, do much harm to the society in which he operates.

When anti-social interests are being expressed, society suffers not only from the damage of the direct attack but also because of the harm done to the quality of living of its citizens whose lives are to that degree poorer in content and productiveness. As healthy living tends to foster the expansion of health in oneself and others, unhealthy or anti-social behavior tends to have a negative effect.

The Sources of Anti-Social Behavior

Anti-social behavior may originate in the same unhealthy conditions which give rise to the development of unhealthy interests. Indeed, "anti-social behavior" is merely another term for the expression of unhealthy interests; it stresses the effect that such expression has on the well-being of society.
Anti-social interests and behavior may have their roots in the frustrations which accompany the "unlived life" mentioned by Fromm. In the words of an article on juvenile delinquency:

... the immediate precipitating cause of delinquent behavior is in the emotional life of the delinquent: in his feeling about himself, his conditions and circumstances. Though he is usually unable to phrase his discontent, he is nevertheless an unsatisfied individual. The really satisfied youngster is not delinquent. Delinquency is a reactive, impulsive endeavor to find direct or indirect substitutive satisfactions for natural urges.

In a way, the possessor of an anti-social interest is justified in his dislike for society, for it is the institutions of society that have served to block or hinder his chances of identifying and working on healthy interests. Although he may not be able to clearly define the sources of his frustration, he may have an undifferentiated feeling of hostility which finally achieves expression in his anti-social behavior.

Anti-social behavior may also arise, not out of frustration, but as a result of the normal learning process.

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The youngster may, in the course of his daily living experiences, develop anti-social interests which reflect the norms of the community in which he lives. In such a case—when the home environment is impoverished of healthy stimuli—the only possible source of healthy interests may be the school.

**Educational significance.** The school has a responsibility to society not to encourage anti-social behavior in young people. Nevertheless, school practices which tend to ignore or block the expression of interest may have just this result. If the school program tends to block the development of healthy interests, it may find that it is forcing youngsters to develop interests away from school, sometimes under the influence of unwholesome environmental conditions. When this happens, young people may learn unhealthy interests and anti-social behavior by default, in a vacuum left in their lives by the failure of the educational agencies of the community to enable them to develop healthy interests.

It would seem, therefore, that only by actively encouraging the identification and nurturing of healthy interests may the school fulfill its obligation to society to turn out youngsters having "pro-social" interests.
Conclusion

The power motivating interest is the basic human drive for self-preservation and enhancement. When encouraged, healthy interests may serve both individual and social well-being. They may influence the quality of mental health achieved as well as the degree to which the individual attains self-fulfilment, both factors having great significance for the general health and well-being of society.

This same force, when actively suppressed or left to its own devices, may become distorted, eventually finding expression through the development of interests of an unhealthy character. The modern juvenile delinquent stands as an example of the individual whose positive strivings have not been recognized or provided for by either the home or the school and who is, therefore, forced to seek interest outlets "on his own," frequently under unhealthy conditions.

It is the school's responsibility, therefore, to encourage the development of healthy interests while discouraging unhealthy ones, in order that student interest, a potent positive force, may find expression in healthy, social outlets.
CHAPTER V

INTEREST AND SOME DEMOCRATIC OBJECTIVES

The term "democracy," when considered as a philosophical concept, has a generally accepted meaning. It is when an attempt is made to define democracy in terms of behavior, that confusion and disagreement often arise. The bridge between philosophical formulations on the one hand, and behavior on the other, merits thorough exploration.

In the following discussion, consideration is given to the general concept of democracy as it has been defined by a representative group of writers. An attempt is made to indicate how interest may be dealt with in a manner which is consistent with and expressive of the spirit of several objectives which stand at the foundation of the democratic orientation.

I. SOME DEMOCRATIC OBJECTIVES

Characteristics of a Democratic Society

In preparing an instrument with which classroom procedures might be measured, Balton reviewed the literature on educational philosophy and listed the concepts of democracy which were held in common by representative authors in the field. It is from her summary of this material that the following characteristics of a democratic society have
been selected:

1. Human personality is of supreme value and must be respected in all dealings.
2. There is faith in the essential worth of each individual human being.
3. There is sharing by the individual, in so far as is possible, in making the decisions by which the individual is bound.
4. There is faith in the capacity of individuals to rule themselves well. This faith is based on sufficient background of knowledge and intelligent understanding by the people of the issues, facts, and conditions about which they make decisions.
5. Democracy requires the fullest possible participation of the people in government.1

Respect for Personality

The well-being of the individual human being is of central significance in the democratic orientation. Indeed, the entire structure of the ideal democratic society is based on respect for the worth and dignity of each person. As Kilpatrick has written:

The spirit of democracy as a way of life . . . is the moral obligation to respect personality as such . . . this principle of respect for personality is the focal essence of the democratic way of life, its ruling conception, its aim—in a word, the criterion by which to judge whether any proposed measure is or is not consistent with the spirit of democracy.2

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Elsewhere, in discussing the place of freedom in the democratic system, he continues:

... what is the essence of democracy? ... freedom is essential ... but it may show a truer regard for all the factors involved to say that respect for personality comes first, with freedom (limited by equality, and thus defining justice) following as necessary to implement any true respect for personality.¹

Respect for personality may be expressed in several ways, each of which serves to affirm the worth and dignity of the individual. It is to the analysis of several such procedures that the discussion now moves.

**Encouraging Growth**

In general, respect for personality entails the provision of conditions under which the greatest possible self-realization on the part of each person is facilitated. Growth in all facets of the individual's personality is encouraged. Within the educational setting, each learner is enabled to grow in a healthy manner toward the fulfilment of his unique potentialities.

Fromm has described such an orientation toward human growth and development in his discussion of "productive love," which follows:

To love a person productively implies to care and to feel responsible for his life, not only for his physical existence but for the growth and development of all his human powers. To love productively is incompatible with being passive, with being an onlooker at the loved person's life; it implies labor and care and the responsibility for his growth.¹

**Encouraging Learner Responsibility**

Although human growth may be encouraged by external conditions, it is basically an active process of and within the person himself. The educator may establish an environment conducive to growth but it is the student's responsibility to take advantage of the possibilities of the situation. It is part of the democratic faith that the individual has the capacity and is by right entitled to be an active participant in the learning process.

Education within the democratic orientation enables a person to grow in his responsibility for his own actions, and achieves this end through a process of gradually allowing him to bear responsibility. Kilpatrick emphasizes responsibility on the part of the learner as he expands his discussion of respect for personality:

Respect for personality means . . . to help each to grow by his own active efforts into the best that

in him lies, specifically to help him to make, of his own volition, choices toward ever better ends. This applies to all persons everywhere, to any person-to-person dealings of any sort. To foster and encourage the best now in each one and do this in such a way as to lead to the best result possible for him to develop—such respect for personality is the most sacred thing known among men.  

A person's ability to respect another's growth and development may depend ultimately on two factors: his basic attitudes toward other people and his ability to establish an empathic relationship.

The Democratic Attitude

A person's capacity to encourage self-directed behavior in another may well be dependent upon his depth of commitment to democratic values. Respect for personality is not a technique, rather it is an expression of one's basic faith in the worth and dignity of each human being.

A forceful statement of this point has been presented by Rogers. Although he is focusing his attention on the role of the client-centered therapist, the burden of his thought may apply as well to that of the democratic teacher:

The primary point of importance ... is the attitude held by the counselor toward the worth and the significance of the individual. How do we look upon others? Do we see each person as having worth and dignity in his own right? If we do hold this point

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of view at the verbal level, to what extent is it operationally evident at the behavioral level? Do we tend to treat individuals as persons of worth, or do we subtly devalue them by our attitudes and behavior? Is our philosophy one in which respect for the individual is uppermost? Do we respect his capacity and his right to self-direction, or do we basically believe that his life would be best guided by us? To what extent do we have a need and a desire to dominate others? Are we willing for the individual to select and choose his own values, or are our actions guided by the conviction (usually unspoken) that he would be happiest if he permitted us to select for him his values and standards and goals?1

Empathy

Respect for another may depend to a large degree upon one's knowledge of the other person's unique nature. As Fromm continues his description of "productive love":

Care and responsibility are constituent elements of love, but without respect for and knowledge of the beloved person, love deteriorates into domination and possessiveness. Respect . . . denotes . . . the ability to see a person as he is, to be aware of his individuality and uniqueness. To respect a person is not possible without knowing him; care and responsibility would be blind if they were not guided by the knowledge of the person's individuality.2

Perhaps the deepest insight into the individuality


of another may be achieved by the establishment of an empathic relationship with him. By attempting to put one's self into another's shoes, by trying to see the world from his point of view, one may be able to achieve the depth of understanding upon which true respect for personality may be based.

It is upon just such reasoning that the present practice in the field of client-centered therapy is founded. In Rogers' words:

... it is the counselor's function to assume, in so far as he is able, the internal frame of reference of the client, to perceive the world as the client sees it, to perceive the client himself as he is seen by himself, to lay aside all perceptions from the external frame of reference while doing so, and to communicate something of this empathic understanding to the client.1

Such action on the part of the therapist is, according to Rogers, "the most complete implementation which has thus far been formulated, for the central hypothesis of respect for and reliance upon the capacity of the person."2

Respect for the Phenomenal Self

It has been suggested above that the basic human motive is self-preservation and enhancement.3 If

2Ibid., p. 36.
3See p. 108 above.
this hypothesis is accepted, respect for personality may be interpreted as encompassing activities which facilitate the individual's striving to achieve these objectives.

In other words, when the individual is encouraged to take part in enhancing activities, when he is aided to achieve self-fulfilment through healthy expression of his personality, when he is enabled to grow in his varied capacities; under such conditions he is experiencing an educational program which respects his personality.

A program which is able to take account of the individual's personal motive to enhance his phenomenal self and which in addition encourages him to be an active agent in bringing about the conditions for his own well-being is a program working within and expressing the spirit of the democratic orientation.

**Self-Government**

Basic to democracy is the concept of self-government; in fact, the word "democracy" may be translated as "rule by the people."

The power of self-government is put into the hands of the people on the assumption that given such authority they will be able to bring about the conditions for their individual and collective well-being. There is faith in the capacity of the people to identify their needs and
establish the conditions by which these needs may be satisfied.

Respect for personality, as it is expressed through facilitating the efforts of each person to achieve greater self-realization, may serve not only to assure the well-being of the individual but also to enhance the welfare of society in general. Each citizen, participating in the intelligent governing of his own behavior, both in his individual endeavors and as a member of a group, makes an important contribution to the well-being of the entire community.

It is because of the potential contribution of each person to the welfare of all that "participation" is a key word in democratic thought. The higher the quality of the person's participation in determining his individual and group affairs, the higher the general quality of living for all. It is evident, therefore, that all of society has a stake in the quality of that part of an individual's training which prepares him to become a self-governing personality.
II. INTEREST AND THE DEMOCRATIC OBJECTIVES

The present section considers the relationship between interest and the democratic objectives presented above.

**Interest and Respect for Personality**

Basic to democratic theory is the concept of the worth and dignity of each human being. Because each person is so highly valued, it is the obligation of the democratic society to respect the personality of each of its members.

When personality is viewed in terms of the phenomenological frame of reference, the idea of respect for personality may refer to the deference one has for another's view of the world—his beliefs and feelings, his attitudes and thoughts and, of course, his interests.

It has already been indicated how large a part one's interests play in his internal world. Indeed, they hold such an important position within the phenomenal field that they tend to determine a good portion of an individual's behavior.

Behavior motivated by interest is of significance to the person; for, from his perspective, such activity is perceived as enabling him to preserve and enhance his phenomenal self, the very core of his personality.

Respect for personality, therefore, must include
respect for a person's interests. Such respect must be accorded the individual's right to be interested as well as his right to act in terms of his interests.

The School's Responsibility in Respecting Interests

How might respect for interest find expression within the school program? The following suggestions, some of which are elaborated in Chapter VI, may provide guidance to the research bent teacher:

1. Methods should be developed by means of which student interests can be employed as sources of the content and the process of school experiences.

2. The student's right to have healthy interests should not be denied. School practices that tend to block or ignore student interests should be identified and reevaluated.

3. The school should take the initiative in enabling students to identify new interests. The provision of a wide variety of experiences and subject matter should be reexamined in this light.

4. When interests on the part of students are identified, provision should be made for their expression.

5. Teachers should take the initiative in recognizing the interests of their students. Of special significance, in this regard, are procedures by which an empathic
relationship can be established between teachers and students.

6. Students should be encouraged to identify interests of significance to themselves and to communicate information concerning these interests to their teachers.

7. Students should be enabled to take the initiative in finding means by which they may express their interests, both within and outside the school.

8. The school should facilitate student activity motivated by their interests, by providing subject matter as well as training in skills, as these become appropriate in enabling youngsters to nurture their interests.

9. Special attention should be given to the encouragement of interests having deep significance to students, in expectation of such interests developing into Life Theme interests.

10. Positive efforts to establish healthy interests should have priority over negative efforts to discourage unhealthy interests—although both have their place in school practice.

**Interest and Growth**

Part of the previous chapter was devoted to a discussion of the ways in which the process of interest functions in bringing about mental health. Healthy inter-
ests were seen to enable individuals to recognize and strive toward the fulfilment of their potentialities.

Since interest is a process through which psychological growth is achieved, the democratic objective of respecting personality through the encouragement of growth may perhaps be most effectively implemented by providing opportunities for people to identify and actively concern themselves with healthy interests.

**Interest and Self-Government**

Interest, as a process which motivates the individual to establish the conditions for his own well-being may, by virtue of this fact, be the psychological foundation of self-directed and self-governing behavior. The more clearly a person recognizes his inner needs, the more readily will he be able to select means appropriate for their satisfaction. The product of self-directed efforts may well depend upon the person's ability to know himself and to be aware of what he is really interested in.

Encouraging persons to identify and take action in areas of deep interest may be a significant means by which society can train its young persons to be self-governing individuals and citizens.

**Educational significance.** Democratic living may frequently be learned best through its practice. Students
should, therefore, be provided with ample opportunities to participate in the determination of their own school activities.

Since all persons are motivated to concern themselves with their interests, it is evident that such student determined projects will have as their content, endeavors which are of interest to students. In other words, student selected projects, to the degree that they are of significance to students, are in effect, "interest projects."

It may be suggested, therefore, that an effective way of introducing student interest into the curriculum—one consistent with democratic aims—is that of enabling youngsters to develop their own "interest projects," both as individuals and as members of groups. The more such opportunities with which students are provided, the more expert they will become in bringing their interests to the fore and in dealing with them intelligently.

As young people are permitted to identify their interests, work out methods by which they may be adequately dealt with, put these plans into operation and evaluate the results of their efforts, they will—in addition to gaining the intrinsic values inherent in work on interests—have an opportunity to learn the process of intelligent living, a basic skill of democratic citizenship.
Since the quality of student selected school activities may depend ultimately on the degree of clarity with which each young person perceives his own interests and upon the depth of significance of these interests, whatever the school may do to perfect the quality of individual student interests may in turn enhance the quality of the group projects that are developed. Provision of a wide variety of experiences from which students may identify new interests and broaden old ones may serve indirectly to deepen the significance of student determined group activities.

**Group and Individual Interest Outlets**

If the school is to respect personality by enabling students to express their interests, appropriate outlets for such expression must be found. The present section deals with the appropriateness of group and individual projects as interest outlets. Chapter VI provides a more detailed analysis of this and other questions relating to the educational relevance and employment of student interest.

**Selecting an appropriate outlet.** An outlet for the expression of an interest should be selected in terms of its appropriateness to the interest in question. The decision, for example, of whether a group or an individual interest
project is more appropriate, should depend upon the relative merits of the two kinds of projects in providing the greatest amount of interest expression for the individual student.

If one can most adequately achieve self-enhancement by working on his interest individually, he should be encouraged to seek solitary rather than group activities. If, on the other hand, a group project seems more appropriate to interest expression, then such a project should be encouraged.

**Educational significance.** Since students may achieve the healthy expression of their individual and group interests through their participation in appropriate interest projects, the school would seem obligated to give special attention to the encouragement of such interest outlets.

In developing interest projects, the fullest participation of the students concerned should be sought. Indeed, such "tailor-made" projects may only be practicable when students are willing and able to bear the greatest part of the burden. Whereas it may be impossible for a teacher to develop a special interest project for each of his students, because of the demands made upon him by large classes and limited time, it may be possible for him to encourage and assist students to develop their own individual or group
interest projects.

The success of student determined interest projects may depend in large part upon the amount of responsibility that students are prepared to assume in carrying them out. A school program devoted to the encouragement of healthy interest development must, therefore, stress training in the assumption of responsibility on the part of young people. Since democratic theory includes the premise that persons can grow in their capacity to become responsible for their own behavior if provided with adequate opportunities, the school should attempt to encourage student planned interest projects, regardless of whatever practical difficulties such a program might entail.

Because student determined interest projects grow out of the daily living experiences of students, it may be impossible for teachers to predict the course that their expression might take. Such projects may range from those which are quite conventional in nature, being similar to usual classroom activities, to others having strange and unique features. The more flexible the teacher can be in his thinking, the better able he will be to help his students enhance the quality of the projects which they choose to undertake.

Factors blocking adequate outlet selection. Sometimes, a person's choice of interest outlets may be limited
by factors which are extraneous to the nature of his interests, such as his relative skill in working singly or as a group member, or his emotional needs for companionship. When such factors are in operation, it may be difficult for a person to select outlets which are adequate for the expression of his special interests.

In such cases, the educator must direct his attention to the elimination of the inhibiting effects of these factors. Unless their effect can be decreased, such extraneous factors may make the nurturing of unique individual interests difficult if not impossible.

Frequently, a person may choose not to become involved in a group experience because he lacks the skills of effective group membership. He may prefer to work by himself although such solitary activity may provide him with little opportunity to nurture his interests. In such a case, the school would seem to have a definite responsibility to encourage the student to acquire the group skills necessary in order for him to be able to participate in group activities.

The reverse is also true; sometimes a person will choose to work in a group because he has a need for close personal contact with his peers, although the group project may have little to offer him in terms of his own interests. In such a situation, other social outlets should be
provided so that the student may be able to select interest projects on the single criterion of the greatest facilitation of his individual interest development. Although a youngster's need to be "one of the gang" may be great, it should not be permitted to force him to forego the nurturing of his unique interests. Both his social needs and his need to develop healthy individual interests are important to his welfare and both must be provided for. It is all to the good when both may achieve satisfaction in the same project, but the satisfaction of one should not be allowed to block the satisfaction of the other.

**Interest and group member behavior.** A person's interests may not only determine whether or not he will join a group and the nature of the particular group he chooses to join, but may also affect his behavior as a group member.

His conception of the degree to which the group experience will enable him to express and enhance his interests may, for example, influence both the degree of attraction that the group has for him and the extent to which he becomes an active participant in its various activities. The more closely related the group's endeavors are to his interests, the more highly motivated the person may be to become an active participant.
Since he may be expected to desire the greatest possible outlet for the expression of his interests, the individual may be further motivated to participate in the governing of the group in order that it will more adequately serve his special needs. If, however, in spite of his efforts to change the functioning of the group, it becomes less able to satisfy his interests, the person may be expected to change his behavior accordingly. He may, indeed, choose to leave the group at such a point, depending of course, on whether or not he is able to locate other outlets which will be more effective in providing him with an opportunity to express his interests.

**Educational significance.** If people are to work effectively in a group, they may have to perceive the group as enabling them to express and enhance their interests, that is, they may have to feel that the activities carried on by the group will have personal significance for them.

When students do have such a feeling, they may be intrinsically motivated to participate both in the direction and in the general activities of the group; they will have a tendency to take full advantage of the possibilities inherent in the group experience. The group projects that are provided for youngsters in school might well be reexamined in terms of the degree to which they provide adequate
outlets for the expression of student interests.

At times, students may find that they can best satisfy their interests by working separately. This right to work singly should be respected. In a democratic society, the well-being of each individual is the goal of the system. When this end may be better achieved through individual activities, such activities are fully justified.

The group process is not an end in itself, but rather one of several effective means by which the welfare of the greatest number of individuals can be achieved.
CHAPTER VI

STUDENT INTEREST AND THE CURRICULUM:
SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Interest has long been a subject of educational discourse. As far back as 1899, William James made the statement that "no topic has received more attention from pedagogical writers than that of interest."¹ Nevertheless, even today interest remains a poorly defined concept.²

Regardless of the confusion surrounding the term's meaning, educators still are almost unanimous in their belief that interest plays an important role in successful teaching. A statement of certain commonly accepted ideas relating to interest has been put forth by Binney:

... The child will learn best that in which he is most interested. The child who is interested is not likely to become a disciplinary problem. A child's interests will change from time to time. It is to the teacher's advantage, therefore, to know the child's interests and to appeal to him through these interests.³

Although many teachers may accept such formulations,


³James Binney, "Doctrine of Interest," Education, 73 (October, 1952), 126.
at least on a verbal level, a concerted effort on the part of either theorists or practitioners to present the concept of interest as it relates to education in a comprehensive and clear manner is as yet lacking. This consideration was, indeed, one of the factors which motivated the selection of the present project, one purpose of which is to outline the field for such an endeavor.

That the concept of interest has been neglected in the recent theoretical literature is indicated by the fact that John Dewey's short volume, *Interest and Effort in Education*\(^1\) is still generally considered to be the best work available on the subject, although it was written more than fifty years ago.

The purpose of the present chapter is to consider interest as it relates to school practices. Attention is focused upon student interests (object) as they affect and are affected by curricular practices and the relationship of student interest (process) to both the content and the process of school experiences. A limited attempt is also made to evaluate certain aspects of present school practice in terms of the psychological and philosophical considerations presented in earlier chapters, and to suggest certain innovations.

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I. STUDENT INTERESTS AND THE SELECTION OF SUBJECT MATTER

The degree to which student interests influence the selection of subject matter may vary; nevertheless, the quality of the learning that occurs may depend upon how interested the students are, or may become, in the subject matter to which they are exposed. In the present section, several ways in which student interests are related to subject matter selection are outlined.

For purposes of clarity, a rough scale has been drawn which indicates the range of possibilities regarding the degree to which the interests of students may be taken into account in the selection of subject matter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interests Ignored as Basis</th>
<th>General Notions consulted as Basis</th>
<th>General Studies consulted as Studies</th>
<th>Specific Classes consulted as Classes</th>
<th>Interest Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

At the left end of the scale is the situation in which student interests are ignored, while at the far right is that in which student interests are the main source of subject matter. The intervals along the scale represent situations which fall between the two extremes. Several issues concerning student interests as they relate to each of these situations will be briefly indicated.
Interests Ignored

... There are certain things which a teacher has a right to insist should be learned by the student—whether or not the student is interested. 1

Subject matter is frequently selected in terms of criteria other than that of the present interests of students, often by curriculum committees at a higher level than that of the classroom teacher. Since teachers and students have little to do with its selection, such content often remains the same over a period of years, being assigned to specific grade levels at which all students are required to study it. Having stability, such subject matter is often organized in text books which are used repeatedly by successive classes.

Content of this sort is sometimes prescribed in great detail, while at other times the syllabus may contain merely a skeleton outline of suggested topics. Whatever the degree of specificity of the curriculum directives, the teacher is expected to guide his efforts accordingly, covering specific content areas within designated periods of time.

Raw material for the development of new interests. A person can only become interested in elements that are

1James Binney, "Doctrine of Interest," Education, 73 (October, 1952), 129.
present in his environment. Once his environment includes certain elements, they may or may not elicit his interest depending upon several factors, among which the person's psychological make-up is of special importance.¹

The educational environment of the school is frequently composed in large part of predetermined subject matter which may, at times, provide the raw material out of which new interests may be fashioned. Whether or not a particular aspect of this content will arouse interest often cannot be determined until the students have been exposed to it, but unless such exposure takes place, certain student interests may never be identified.

A student having a potential interest in the study of foreign languages may, for example, be able to recognize that such an interest exists for him, if he can be exposed to such study during the course of his school work. If he is not given this opportunity, this interest may never come to his awareness.

Material which contributes to existing interests. Upon entering a class, a student may find that the content being covered is, by coincidence, just what he needs in order to nurture an already active interest. Although this might

¹See section III. of Chapter II, "The Genesis of Interest," p. 48 above.
provide a high quality learning experience for the student, the probability of its happening may not be very great.

In the case of the elective option, the situation is somewhat different. Although the subject matter of the courses is predetermined, the student is permitted to select his courses. A young person who has already identified an area of interest may, in this case, select a course in order to express and enhance his interest.

*Interesting material within content limits.* A third way in which interest may be related to predetermined subject matter is illustrated in the situation in which the syllabus is rather broad in scope and not too specific in designating particular units of subject matter. In this case, there may be freedom for teachers and students to focus their attention on those areas of the subject which are of greatest interest to them. In this manner, an English class may select for intensive study a few reading selections in which its members are particularly interested from a large number that may be suggested in the syllabus.

The amount of freedom allowed a class to select material from that which is prescribed depends to a large extent on the limits set both by the printed syllabus and school policies. Nevertheless, there is frequently more freedom of choice allowed than is actually employed.
General Notions and Studies of Student Interests

Again and again the literature on children's interests offers evidence of a belief that there is a basic pattern of interests which can be identified once and for all by the application of a proper device for locating them.¹

Desiring to select subject matter that is of interest to students, curriculum committees may frequently base their selections of content either upon their general notions of student interests or upon the results of printed studies. They may do so in the mistaken belief that student interests are universal and "can be identified once and for all by the application of a proper device . . . ."

If it is true, however, that student interests are influenced by many factors—and are, therefore, far from being universal²—it would seem that any real attempt to provide interesting subject matter must focus its attention upon the unique interests of the students present in particular situations. Since printed studies—although providing more valid information than general notions—may provide little detailed information relevant to the interests of particular students, it may be next to impossible


to select subject matter in advance which is of direct interest to students. Curriculum committees may be more successful in achieving their objectives if they will provide wide leeway in their curricular directives so that teachers and students may select, from the suggested content, that which is of greatest interest to them.

**Study of One's Class**

If his situation allows, the teacher may select his subject matter in terms of the interests of the students in his classes. He may, for example, survey present interests, selecting content for class consideration on the basis of his findings. His field of choice may be limited to his subject area, but within it he may, nevertheless, have a rather wide selection of content from which to select.

In exploring the interests of the students in his classes, the teacher may employ one or more of the large number of devices that have been prepared by research workers, or he may develop an instrument of his own. The studies available in the literature may be of help in suggesting tools and techniques.

Almost any means by which the teacher may get to know his students may help him to a better understanding.

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1See "Limitations of Studies," p. 68 above.
2See "Reviews of the Literature," p. 64 above.
of their interests. If, for instance, he is able to establish a permissive atmosphere in his class, he may have a good opportunity to observe his students as they actively express their interests.

Since the establishment of an empathic relationship is an effective means of gaining insight into another's interests, practitioners might well investigate ways and means of achieving empathy in the classroom.

An illustration. An example of how a teacher may study his class in order to build curricular experiences on student interests is provided in an article by a high school science teacher.

In this instance, the first step was to develop a checklist of scientific endeavors based upon material available in a teaching text. Next, copies of the list were given to the students in the class, with the request that they indicate their feelings about each activity, using a scale as a guide (strongly like, like, doesn't matter, dislike, have never done).

After compiling and studying the results, the teacher used the areas of greatest interest to the largest number of pupils as the basis for his preparation of science

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units as follows:

1. Interest in raising fish was used in a unit on parental care.
2. Interest in athletics was used for a unit on heredity and eugenics.
3. Since the children indicated that they had never raised vegetables or flowers, "opportunity was provided for plant growing" in a unit on reproduction.
4. Three boys who indicated interest in running a slide projector were given the opportunity to do so.

Lesser concludes his article with the statement:

... Whenever the strong interests of the pupils were utilized and whenever the activities presented were new experiences, there was a noticeable improvement in the pupils' willingness to participate and learn.¹

Interest the Major Source

The situation in which student interests are most completely utilized in selecting subject matter may be that in which the pupils are encouraged to develop their own learning experiences.

Whereas, in the case of the teacher studying his class, there may be student resistance toward disclosing matters of deep concern, this may not be true when students are permitted to assume responsibility for developing their own interest projects. When working on projects of signif-

icance to them, students may have little hesitancy in sharing information concerning their interests, if they know that this material will be used to perfect these experiences.

The importance of this point in the measurement of interests should not be overlooked. If a youngster is asked to describe his interests merely for the sake of the investigator, gaining nothing himself in the way of nurturing his interests, the information he divulges may be quite different from that which he might volunteer if he knows that the degree to which he will be able to occupy himself with his interests depends upon the sufficiency of his answer.

It may be suggested, therefore, that a rewarding method of studying student interests is to observe and interview the students while they are in the process of developing class or individual projects relating to their interests.¹

**Individual Interest Projects**

Student interests may be expressed in either group or individual projects. When the focus is on the interests of

¹The interests that are listed on p. 77 above were identified in terms of student readiness to apply themselves in these areas over an extended period of time.
individuals, some rather unique areas of interest may be identified. Such singular individual interests may only find expression through the development of special individual projects, tailored to fit the needs of the person concerned.

It might be noted that the provision of such individual projects may have a long-term significance for the young person's development. If such projects are encouraged over the entire period of the student's education he may have an opportunity to gain a head start on the development of his Life Theme Interests. ¹

An example of a project based on the unique interests of individual students which was devised by the present writer, will be briefly described.

Each child in a class made up of both seventh and eighth graders was given a standing assignment at the beginning of the year to select an area in which he was interested and spend some time working on it each day. At the end of each week, the children were to give the teacher a brief progress report; and at the end of the semester, each child was to have one hour in which to report on his project to the entire class. The children were also told that the

¹See "Encouraging the Development of Life Theme Interests," p. 92 above.
teacher would be available at designated times during the week to discuss any problems that might arise. The teacher, on his part, would read the reports each week end, returning them on Monday morning together with written comments and suggestions as to future activities.

The students were informed that they might select any area in which they were really interested and might, if they tired of one topic, change to another. A child might even work on more than one project at a time if he so desired.

It may be noted that this interest assignment was only one aspect of the children's entire program; the rest of which covered the traditional subject areas. Subjects selected by students in this and other classes of this type have been listed above.¹

The reactions of the students to this individual interest project were somewhat varied. Several children caught the spirit of the project almost immediately and from the first considered it to be one of the outstanding parts of their school program. It provided them with the opportunity—as part of their required school work and with the active cooperation of their teacher—to work on matters which were of deep concern to them, but which they had not

¹See p. 77 above.
previously felt to have a place in the classroom.

Other children felt rather disturbed when the project was assigned, complaining that they "weren't interested in anything." However, as the term progressed and the other children in the class moved ahead on their projects, even the more hesitant selected topics and got to work.

The degree of depth that different children achieved in working on their interests seemed to vary. Those who had already defined projects on their own before the teacher made the assignment, (which they thought of as hobbies) seemed to move readily toward working on their interests as a school activity and became quite involved. Other children who started with nothing went rather deep, while still others barely scratched the surface. This particular project continued for an entire school year.¹

Some of the activities which youngsters included in their work on their interest projects were: keeping "Interest Scrapbooks"; reading books and other written material on their topics; research in reference works; writing letters to famous persons and other sources of information; viewing movies at the local library and at local movie

¹The school year of 1952-1953.
houses; watching television programs; listening to the radio; listening to long-playing records; writing compositions and book reports; drawing pictures and clipping articles and pictures from newspapers and magazines.

**Group Interest Projects**

Students may come together in groups to formulate projects based upon interests which are shared. Since such groups are composed of individuals with interests, it would seem to follow that the ability of a group to locate matters of group interest may depend on how well defined each member's interests may be. If each person who joins a group has poorly defined interests, it is quite possible that the group will have difficulties in locating common interests. Enabling individuals to develop significant interests through individual interest projects may set the stage for the development of group interest projects of a high quality.¹

Several examples of people coming together in groups in order to locate and work upon areas of common interest are available in the literature in the field of group dynamics. For illustrative purposes, such a group

¹This was observed in the project described above, e.g., two girls, each of whom was working on an individual project on ballet came together at times to share their efforts.
learning situation, as described by Kelly in his book The Workshop Way of Learning\(^1\), will be briefly sketched.

The participants were practicing school teachers registered in a workshop course at Wayne University, which met from 4:30 to 9:00 p.m., once a week for the entire school year.

No subject matter was predetermined for class consideration, instead, the students were to locate areas of interest to them and then develop and carry out plans for the exploration of these areas.

At the start of the course, the students were assigned to temporary problem-finding groups in which their task was to define the areas in which they desired to work. These areas were then tabulated, categorized and presented to the entire class for additions or corrections. At this point, the students were asked to select from the list the topic which most interested them and on the basis of their choices, interest groups averaging eight to twelve persons were formed.

It was the responsibility of the members of these interest groups to identify specific problems within their general area and to formulate and execute plans relating

\[^1\text{Karl C. Kelly, The Workshop Way of Learning (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951).}\]
to these projects. The principal function of the staff members in this situation was to facilitate the functioning of the groups.

A detailed description of this course, including the theory behind its organization and an evaluation of outcomes may be found in Kelly's volume. At the time the report was written (1950) the course described had been in existence for thirteen years and according to the evaluation material available, seemed to have been very favorably received by the participants. Many of the students involved in this course seemed to consider this opportunity to initiate interest directed activity a highly valuable educational experience.

II. SOME CONSIDERATIONS OF METHOD RELATING TO INTEREST

So far, the focus has been on student interests and ways in which they may be related to the selection of subject matter. It has been indirectly suggested that it may not be entirely possible to separate the source of subject matter from the question of methodology. The discussion now shifts to the consideration of some practical circumstances in which interest is related to method.

The Straight Presentation

When subject matter is predetermined, the teacher
has little choice but to present it to his classes in the most favorable manner. He must do so regardless of the degree to which it is of interest to his students.

Since most educators seem to agree that learning takes place more readily when interest is present, the teacher having to teach predetermined subject matter frequently perceives his task as that of "making his subject interesting," unless, of course, his students happen already to be interested.

**Interesting Subject Matter**

It sometimes happens that students are intrinsically interested in the subject from the start (this may be true when students select an elective course on a subject in which they are interested). In this case, the role of the teacher is, in a way, rather simple.\(^1\) He has merely to present the content in a clear and logical manner and his students will tend to "soak it up." Being intrinsically interested, that is, perceiving a relationship to exist between the material to be learned and their own well-

\(^1\)Once the problem of getting students interested has been solved, the teacher's role is threefold: preparation of the subject, communication to the pupils, and "fixing the impression." See Gilbert Highet, *The Art of Teaching* (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), especially Chapter III, "The Teacher's Method," pp. 66-153.
being, the students may tend to be quiet and orderly, with their attention focused on matter under consideration. If any problems are present in such a situation, they relate to such matters as the adequacy of the teacher's knowledge of his subject and his ability to communicate effectively.

Such a situation in which students are intrinsically motivated to learn may be a deeply satisfying one for the teacher as well as for his pupils. Having no extraneous problems of keeping discipline or "getting students interested," he can get right down to the job at hand, teaching, something which the teacher should find interesting in itself and, therefore, highly enjoyable. Although this may seem like the millennium, it actually can and does happen—especially in those classes in which student interests are really respected.

When interesting matter is selected in the first place, intrinsically motivated learning may be expected. When, however, the influence of student interests on the selection of subject matter is small or non-existent, certain methodological difficulties arise which can be included under the general heading of "making subject matter interesting."
Making Subject Matter Interesting

... If students are required to study something in which they are not interested at first, they may be steered into an active interest in the subject by proper organization and presentation of the work. A skillful teacher can lead children to become interested in almost anything.

The assumption made by some theorists that a good teacher can "make" almost any subject interesting to almost any student, merits careful examination.

As has already been indicated, interest is a psychological process in which one perceives certain aspects of his environment to be positively related to his self-preservation and enhancement. Whether or not a student will become interested in a particular matter will depend not only upon the character of the material to which he is exposed and the way in which it is presented (aspects of his environment) but also upon his own individual make-up, his unique personality. The more unique one's picture of the world and especially his concept of self, the more difficult it may be to "interest" him in a given type of subject

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1See also p. 120 above.


matter. The statement that "a skillful teacher can lead children to become interested in almost anything" seems to imply either that interest is unrelated to self, or that uniqueness of self-concept does not exist, both of which seem rather untenable assumptions. A teacher may expose a student to new subject matter in a highly favorable manner, but whether or not interest will be aroused is not solely dependent upon the teacher's efforts.

Since interest is present when a student perceives the subject matter to be significant to his well-being, as contributing to the preservation and enhancement of his phenomenal self, the task of the teacher in "making" something interesting is basically one of bringing about perceptual change on the part of the student.

Assuming the subject matter to be of functional significance to the student (although he does not so perceive it) the problem becomes one of illuminating it in such a manner that the student sees it in a new light. Starting with material which is perceived by the student as being uninteresting, that is, having little if any personal significance, the teacher, through the art of his calling, brings the student to the new awareness that the subject in question has qualities which can lead to his own

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1See "Perceived Significance of Interests," p. 33 and "Interests and Self," p. 110 above.
(the student's) well-being.

It should be noted that this entire sequence of "making" subject matter interesting is founded upon the assumption that the matter is potentially of interest to the student, that it actually is of some significance to him (although in the beginning he is not aware of this). If the subject matter does not possess this quality, interest arousal will not take place and the teacher might just as well exert his energy in some other, more rewarding endeavor.

Individual differences being as varied as they are, a teacher may usually be certain that he will not be able to interest all of his students in his particular subject area, but this fact should not cause him to reduce his efforts. There are almost always some students who have a potential interest in almost any subject, and these students can be "reached" if the teacher does an effective job.

Since there is probably no certain method by which teachers can predict which students may have potential interests in specific subject areas, they are frequently forced to expose all students to the subject matter at hand. Once this has been done, it may then be possible to note indications of the presence of interest.

As is noted below, the arousal of interest is only the first step in the teaching process. An even more important function is that of helping students to follow
up their interests once they have emerged so that they will be retained and not extinguished.

The Interesting Presentation

In attempting to make their subjects interesting, teachers sometimes select elaborate procedures for the presentation of content, trusting that an interesting presentation will accomplish their end. They may show motion pictures, play records, take classes on trips, invite guest speakers or use any other means at their disposal.

Teachers frequently find, however, that although the students may have become interested in the ingenious techniques that they have employed—perhaps because of their novelty—they may still have developed no interest in the subject itself. A classic illustration of this has been provided by Thorndike:

It had seemed to Miss Bessie advisable that the children should know something of the world on which they live, and for purposes of instruction she had selected a geyser and a volcano as important—not to say interesting—features of land structure. By means of a rubber ball with a hole in it, artfully concealed in a pile of sand, she had simulated a volcano.

We began our work with geography in ignorance of these facts. After a few lessons on hills, mountains, islands, capes, and bays the children informed us that they "didn't like those old
things." "Please won't you give us the fireworks," asked Freddie. "Or the squirt?" added Arnes, eagerly.¹

It is evident then, that regardless of the technique employed, unless a student comes to see a relationship between the content and his own well-being, he still will not have been "made" interested.

Stop the Music

Frequently, during a teacher's attempt to fulfill his obligation in regard to predetermined subject matter, a point is reached at which he must make a crucial decision concerning interest. The alternative he selects at such a time may well reflect the basic attitude toward the place of interest in the curriculum under which he is operating.

Such a point is reached, when, in the course of the regular presentation of subject matter, the interest of the members of the class is suddenly piqued. Some item either in the text or in the material presented orally by the instructor captures the attention of the students. Immediately, hands pop up and searching questions and comments are forthcoming. The teacher decides to spend a short

time discussing the matter, but when that time has expired, the interest remains. Indeed, let it be assumed that during the course of the discussion, it has become evident that interest has been increasing. At this point, the decision must be made. Should the teacher "stop the music" and pursue the interesting matter at hand or should he get back to the presentation of new material?

At least two factors will influence the teacher's decision: the subject matter requirements that have been set for him by higher authorities and his own readiness to work on student interests.

There are some situations in which the curriculum requirements are so rigid that the teacher has little leeway. Because there is so much content contained in the syllabus, he has little choice but to push on with the new material in order to get it all in during the time allotted.

Under other conditions, when the curriculum is stated more as suggestion than as requirement, the teacher may have more freedom of action. Whether or not he will accept the challenge to pursue interests which arise in class will depend upon his own beliefs about the role of interest in education and upon his general willingness to work on "interest projects." It can only be regretted that many fine opportunities to utilize interest are either ignored or willingly passed over.
Dealing With Class Interest

Once real interest is evidenced on the part of his students, the teacher is provided with a starting point for an intrinsically motivated project. If the challenge of such an opportunity is accepted, then it is up to the students and himself to identify the particular matter at issue and to make plans for its study.¹

When the interest of a class is guiding its efforts, the teacher must be prepared to function with the greatest of flexibility. One thing may lead to another and before long, the class may be dealing with material that is quite different from anything outlined in the formal course of study. Indeed, at times, the teacher may find the project moving into other content areas, the realms of other teachers.

Just how far a teacher may want to continue with such a project will depend ultimately upon the circumstances prevailing in his situation, especially upon such factors as the degree of cooperation he gets from the other teachers and the students' and his own skill in keeping the

project moving. When the quality of skills held by the participants in such projects is high, class interest projects may become highly valuable learning experiences.

If, on the other hand, the teacher decides to ignore interest which is aroused in class, and to move right on with new material, such action may have far reaching implications.

In terms of the educational philosophy under which he is operating, he is indicating that student interests have little if any significance. Such a philosophy might be expressed in the following words:

Interest is not important. The matter of first importance is to make certain that all of the required subject matter is covered. Whether any part of that subject matter becomes of significance to the students is only of minor importance. If students are frustrated in their interest expression and become soured on the entire subject area, this cannot be helped. The only thing that really matters is to present all the content that is outlined in the syllabus.

From the point of view of the student, the ignoring of interest once it has been aroused, may have significant consequences.\(^1\) The teacher is, in effect, indicating his indifference to what is interesting to his students. Such an attitude might well be examined in terms of the democratic objective of respect for personality, especially

\(^1\) See "The Suppression of Interest," p. 42 above.
as it is expressed through respecting one's interests.¹

Such an educational philosophy may, through its disregard for student readiness to learn, do real damage to the quality of learning that takes place.² It may, indeed, prevent students from becoming deeply interested in the very subject matter that the teacher is presenting, a rather questionable educational outcome. That such a blocking of interest expression may also result in harm to student mental health and sometimes even lead to the development of unhealthy interests has already been noted.³

It would seem, then, that a philosophy that prevents teachers from stopping to deal with student interest as it is aroused in the course of teaching is a philosophy which does not take interest seriously and which, therefore, seems to violate principles of learning, mental hygiene and democratic thought. That such a philosophy merits careful study, especially in regard to the influence it has on student well-being, seems a somewhat obvious conclusion.⁴

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¹See "Interest and Respect for Personality," p. 156.

²See the discussion of "Readiness," p. 116.

³See the section entitled "The Unhealthy Interest," p. 135 above.

⁴This philosophy is probably more frequently an operational one than it is a reflection of practitioner attitudes regarding interest. It seems important, therefore, that this discrepancy between theory and practice be brought to conscious awareness.
III. PROVIDING FOR AROUSED INTERESTS

If, in accordance with democratic objectives, student interests are to be respected, the school must make adequate provision for the nurturing of interests which arise in the lives of young people.

It might also be suggested that the time to deal with interests is while they are actively aroused. For both practical and psychological reasons, it may be inadvisable to pass over an interest when it appears, with the intent of returning to it later. Not only may there never again be a suitable occasion to deal with the matter, but in addition, the same quality of psychological readiness on the part of the student may never recur.  

The first spark of interest may be a rather fragile thing, subject to quick extinction unless carefully tended at the moment of its emergence. Part of the task is to kindle interest, but no less important is the responsibility to fan the first spark into a healthy flame. Indeed, unless provision is made for incipient interests to be nurtured, the very act of igniting them may have little value.

If the school's purpose is to develop burning

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1 See "Readiness," p. 116 above.
interest, it must do more than supply the match; in addition it must make certain both that the first spark is not extinguished and that solid fuel is available. It must husband the emergent interest until it has reached such a heat that its fire will be able to maintain itself.

When, in the course of his teaching, a teacher arouses the interest of his students, he is provided with an important opportunity to drive home significant learnings. A student's education may well depend upon how frequently teachers are able to capitalize on such opportunities.

The Subject Teacher's Responsibility

It has already been suggested that the straight presentation of subject matter establishes a content background for the emergence of student interests. The subject matter may serve as the raw material out of which interests may arise.¹

In the course of the subject teacher's presentation, certain topics may arouse particular interest. If student interests are to be respected, it becomes the teacher's responsibility to make provision for such interests to be recognized and encouraged.

¹See p. 171 above.
When the number of students evidencing interest is small, provision might be made for the individuals or small groups concerned to pursue their interests through supervised study or activity on an individual or small group basis. Provision within the school curriculum might be made for the subject specialists to meet separately with these students and to guide them in the setting up of special projects within which their unique interests might be explored and expressed.

If, however, the entire class or at least a majority of students indicate a marked interest, then the subject teacher might well be given the freedom to develop—along with his students—projects which will enable them to explore the matter more deeply.¹

Although this might tend to move the class somewhat afield from the suggested subject matter, it might, on the other hand, allow the students to cover other matters within the subject field which may be of equal or even greater importance. Indeed, there seems little doubt that the material which is covered in this manner will be of real significance to the pupils, for it is selected on exactly this basis.

¹See "Stop the Music," p. 191 above.
If the project seems to be moving into another subject area, it may be possible for the subject teacher who began the project to either turn the project over to another teacher who is an expert in that area or to join forces with the second teacher in developing a joint project.

In this manner, a science project, built upon a class interest in atomic energy might be enriched by utilizing the competence of a social studies teacher to guide an exploration of the social significance of atomic power. The social studies teacher may, for instance, be invited to the science class once or twice to act as a resource person or discussion leader. If, after such an experience, the class interest in the atom continues to grow, the social studies teacher might use this interest as a content focus in his own classes with these students.

The success of such a program will depend, of course, upon the degree of cooperation that can be achieved between staff members and upon their feelings regarding the import of projects developed around student interest.

It should be noted that such class projects may remain valuable as learning experiences only as long as the students are actively interested. If, as the project proceeds, it becomes evident that interest is waning, the subject teacher may be fully justified in dropping the
project and returning to his former task of presenting
new subject matter.

During the development of a class interest project, opportunities may present themselves when it is appropriate for the subject teacher to introduce material which he might have scheduled for later consideration. Such content may take on added meaning when presented within the context of an ongoing interest project. The teacher should, however, in keeping with his objective of respecting the interests of his students, guard against the temptation of introducing subject matter at times when it may be inappropriate.

**The Interests of Individuals**

Many interests may arise in the lives of young people which are not stimulated by classroom experiences. They may develop, for instance, within extra-curricular activities or may be aroused by a youngster's viewing of a movie or a television program, or perhaps by a community activity in which he has engaged.

Since the school has a stake in the encouragement of healthy interests in young people, it might well be considered a responsibility of the school to become aware of such interests when they arise and to encourage the students to locate healthy outlets through which they may
find expression.

If a student knows that the school will respect his interests and will enable him to locate outlets for their expression, he may have little hesitancy in sharing his out of school concerns with his teachers. Of course, the school may not be able, in itself, to provide for every healthy student interest that may arise; but in cooperation with other community agencies, it may be able to make certain that some healthy outlet is either found or created for most of them.

The recognition and nurturing of individual interests when they appear should not be underestimated in importance. As has already been suggested, interests of deep significance may have their origin in matters which seem to be rather inconsequential.\(^1\) There may be no effective method of encouraging incipient Life Theme Interests other than that of nurturing potentially healthy interests as they arise. Some interests of this sort will no doubt be quickly dropped, but others may grow and expand with time. Which interests may grow to have a long term significance is something that cannot be predetermined. Only as each interest is nurtured is it possible to note

\(^1\) See "Encouraging the Development of Life Theme Interests," p. 92 above.
which have the tendency to expand in significance.

**Nurturing Life Theme Interests**

Since Life Theme Interests are the result of long time developmental processes, provisions should be made for their nurturing at all levels of the educational ladder. From the elementary school through the college, each student should be given the opportunity to concern himself actively with those activities which are of unique significance to him. Such activities should be under the continuing guidance of trained educators, whose purpose it is to nurture healthy interests of deep significance.

In the elementary school, it may be rather easy for the teacher to devote a short period each day for work on individual interest projects.¹ At the junior and senior high school levels, perhaps one period during the day can be designated as an interest period. At the college level, it may not be necessary to make a special time allotment for this purpose. However, it may be possible to assign one faculty person to each student, whose task it would be during the entire course of his stay at school, to guide the student in the development of projects relating to his unique interests. Just as college students have academic

¹ See "Individual Interest Projects," p. 178 above.
advisers, they might also have "interest project advisers," persons who are prepared to give detailed guidance to the student's active efforts to enhance his Life Theme Interests.

In the following section, a plan is outlined by means of which the individual interests of students at the elementary and high school levels might be encouraged.

Providing for Individual Interest Projects in School

If the school is to deal with individual interests as they arise, certain practical considerations must be faced.

Time and resources. Provision should be made within the curriculum for students to occupy themselves with their interests. In addition, the resources of the school, both human and material should be made available to the students so that they may have both expert guidance and the necessary physical resources as they pursue their varied interests.

A plan by which this might be accomplished entails the designation of a period each day, during which the entire facilities of the school would be devoted to work on individual and small group interest projects.

In this program, subject teachers would be designated as content resource persons, to whom the students
might turn for consultation and special help. Such physical resources as libraries, shops and studios would also be made available.

During such a period, each student would be permitted to make his own selection of activity, regardless of his class affiliations. Provision might also be made for small group activities relating to common interests whenever such projects seemed appropriate to the interest needs of individuals.

**Consultation.** Just as each student usually has an academic adviser, provision would be made for some of the members of the school staff to serve as "interest consultants." It would be the task of these consultants to counsel students in such a manner as to enable them to find appropriate interest outlets. They might refer students to other staff members who would be serving as specialists in their own fields of competence or to interest groups composed of students sharing common interests. They might also suggest out-of-school community resources which would serve either as sources of information for projects carried on in school or as interest outlets for the after school use of the students.

As envisioned, this interest period would be a regular assigned period during the day for both students and
faculty. It would be an important and serious part of the curriculum, not a "free" or "extra-curricular" period. It would be that part of the school day when the unique interests of the individual students would become the basis of the curriculum. During the remainder of the day, the regular program could continue without change.

**Some other considerations.** It is suggested that during one period of the regular school day, each student be given a definite assignment, namely, to work on some matter of healthy interest to himself; this work to be carried out under the guidance of members of the school staff who are best prepared to facilitate his efforts.

Would such a program lead to disorder? Some children might fit into it very easily but others might present certain difficulties. The situation of several types of student, when faced with an interest program, will be briefly considered.

Certain students might be assumed to have already identified interests at the time that the program is put into effect. Such students might well jump at the opportunity to concern themselves with their interests as part of their school program, especially since they would be free to use school facilities for this purpose and to get competent help should difficulties arise.
As to those students who seem to have no interests; how might they fare? This group may not be as large as might appear at first sight, for frequently, youngsters who show little interest in academic subjects have, nevertheless, many well defined interests in which they engage outside of school. The interest period would provide these young people with an opportunity to work on their concerns in school and, in so doing, would enable them to locate—with the help of the school faculty—any content areas which might be relevant to their interests.

In bringing the out-of-school interests of such students under the auspices of the school, teachers would have an excellent opportunity to identify the real concerns of these young people, and to further the development of their interests in healthy directions.

A third group of students is often referred to as "trouble makers"; how might they fit into an interest program? In terms of the previous discussion, such youngsters possess few if any healthy interests and are ready to develop—if they are not already engaged in nurturing—interests of an unhealthy character.

If it is true that unhealthy and anti-social interests result from conditions in which the development of healthy interests has been neglected, it may be just such
students who have the greatest need for special school programs directed at the development of healthy interests. Indeed, since the home environments of these youngsters have not been able to provide healthy interests, the school may be the only agency which is available to them for this purpose.¹

There is still another group of youngsters—those who may be said to exist in an interest vacuum—whose problem is the absence of significant interests in their lives;² what about them? Their possible fate is that of languishing through life, looking for exciting things to do in order to break the monotony of their existence. In the case of these persons, too, (and this group may include a rather large number of youngster) the school would seem to have a definite responsibility to encourage the development of healthy interests.

If an interest program such as that suggested were to be put into effect, some youngsters might have difficulties in adjusting to it. The period of their search for healthy interests might be especially trying for the faculty members who are involved in the project. Neverthe-

¹See the discussion of "The Unhealthy Interest," starting on p. 130 above.

less, it would seem that the school must face the problem of dealing with these youngsters, for the only alternative is that of sending them into the community without healthy interests, a situation which may be only too frequent at present.

In spite of the problems associated with putting an interest program into effect, such efforts may pay large dividends in terms of individual and societal well-being. The enabling of each student to develop healthy interests would appear to be an important aspect of the responsibility of the modern school.

**Some Training Considerations**

When activities are developed by learners in accordance with their interests, the democratic process is finding expression; however, skill in this process is not easily come by. Frequently, such skill is the result of learning experiences which continue over an extended period of time. The present section will consider several of the characteristics of this educational process.

**Shift in responsibility.** The learner is the most important participant in every phase of the democratic learning process, for the basic responsibility for its success rests in his hands. It is the task of the teacher, therefore, to encourage the learner to take responsibility
for his own actions and to provide situations in which he may become increasingly more competent in carrying out projects which are of perceived importance to him.\footnote{See "Encouraging Learner Responsibility," p. 150.}

In the beginning, the teacher may have to bear the greatest burden of responsibility himself. His earliest efforts may be primarily concerned with getting the process under way. This may entail attempts to identify present interests and to provide outlets for their expression, as well as the provision of wide content experiences from which new interests might arise.

As the students become more involved in the process, the teacher may gradually withdraw, allowing the students to take over greater responsibility for identifying their interests and seeking the means by which they may be nurtured.

The eventual aim of the democratic educator may be to withdraw completely from his roles as observer of and planner for the group, thereby allowing the students to carry on these functions themselves. If this can be achieved, the teacher may be able to devote his energy to the role of group resource person or planning consultant. If the teacher can bring his students to a point at which they can assume responsibility for their learning, he can be
confident that each young person, upon leaving school, will have been well prepared to become a competent, self-determining democratic citizen.

It may be somewhat difficult to teach students to take responsibility and to use it intelligently, especially in the case of those individuals who have become used to other means of operation; nevertheless, self-direction can be learned, indeed, must be learned by the majority of students, if our educational system is to become truly democratic in its operation.

Providing content. The school has a continuing responsibility to provide students with the richest possible learning environment. From this wide variety of experiences, the students may be able to locate interests. As interests are identified, provision should be made for the students to develop appropriate individual and group interest projects.

The teacher's task in regard to content is, therefore, twofold. First, to present a constant stream of new material which will provide the students with both a general orientation to the world in which they live, and the raw material from which interests may emerge; and second, to serve as a content resource person providing material as it is needed by the students (or enabling them
to locate it) as they work on projects which are of interest to them.

Providing skills. In regard to skills, the same two responsibilities are present. In the first place, the school must enable each student to learn the basic skills which permit him to become generally oriented to the manipulation of his environment; and secondly, the school must make it possible for the student to develop the specific skills which are necessary in order for him to carry out activities which are related to the expression of his interests.

Conclusion

The democratic objective of respect for personality may be achieved in part through school activities which enable students to nurture healthy interests. To the degree that each individual is encouraged to develop healthy interests—including Life Theme Interests—to that degree is the school fulfilling an important part of its responsibility to provide for the greatest growth and well-being of each student.

There are certain areas in which people are not able to achieve their goals working alone. In these cases, students must learn to recognize the necessity of joining together with fellows in joint endeavors. When two or more
students find that they hold interests in common, the conditions are ripe for the development of group interest projects. As they work together to bring about the conditions for their common well-being, students will be developing the skills of democratic living.

Based on the solid ground of healthy self-interest, the democratic process can work, can be more effective both in fulfilling human potentialities and in achieving the efficient solution of important problems.

The democratic teaching process cannot be established by fiat, but it can be achieved if teachers will direct their efforts toward its ever greater expression in their own situations.
PART FOUR

SUMMARY
CHAPTER VII

STUDENT INTERESTS, THEIR RELEVANCE TO AND EMPLOYMENT IN
DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

1. GENERAL SUMMARY

The term "interest," although widely employed in education and psychology, lacks clarity of definition in contemporary thought. It may be considered in two meanings, as process and as object.

Interest as Process

To facilitate consideration of the concept in its educational setting, the following statements regarding interest as process have been advanced:

Interest is a conscious process, rich in emotional content, in which the individual focuses his attention upon activities or realms of thought (interests) which are perceived by him to be positively related to his self—as being able to facilitate his self-realization and enhancement. The person will tend to express his interest through physical and communicative activity and by seeking associates having similar interests and will tend to resent and resist environmental factors which block or suppress such expression.
The Genesis of Interests

Interests have their genesis in the interaction between the individual and his environment and seem to be limited in their extent only by the specific characteristics of each of these factors. The richer the environmental possibilities available to the individual, the greater his chance of identifying interests having special significance to him.

Interest as Object

The objects of man's interest may be categorized as "universal," "common," or "individual" interests, depending upon the extent to which they are held. Universal interests are held by all persons and are based upon the facts of human existence and physiological development. Common interests are shared by large numbers of persons and are based on the common culture in which they live. Individual interests are less common and more unique in character, for they arise out of the interaction between the individual and his unique environment.

Life Theme Interests

Although an individual may possess several individual interests, some have greater importance to him than others. Given favorable conditions, certain individual interests may grow to have an intense personal signifi-
cance. It is such interests which tend to persist and expand with the passage of time that have been termed "Life Theme Interests."

A person may develop several different Life Theme Interests during the course of his life, each of which may enable him to realize a different aspect of his personality. Such interests serve as cores around which the individual may organize his activities, they provide themes or continuous patterns for his behavior which enable him to organize his experiences into meaningful wholes.

Society benefits from mature Life Theme Interests in its citizens; for with such interests go competent professional performance as well as individual well-being. Successful vocational adjustment and fruitful avocational outlets seem to depend upon the individual's ability to develop mature Life Theme Interests in these areas.

**Psychological Aspects of Interest**

According to one school of contemporary psychological thought, all individual behavior is determined by the organization of the person's phenomenal field at the moment at which the behavior takes place. Of singular significance within the phenomenal field is the individual's concept of self. Activities and thoughts which have a specific relatedness to self will tend to have priority
in one's phenomenal field and to direct one's behavior. Interests, as elements closely related to self, play an important role in the phenomenal field and tend to affect both psychological and outward behavior.

If the basic human motive is assumed to be the drive to preserve and enhance the phenomenal self and if interests are elements which are perceived by the person to serve this very function, then the psychological basis of a person's tendency to concern himself with his interests may be readily explained. Interest may be thought of as the conscious component of the process by means of which the individual acts to preserve and enhance his personal well-being.

Learning. Because the individual is striving to attain self-preservation and enhancement, he is intrinsically motivated to learn subject matter which is perceived by him to have a bearing on his own welfare. He will be interested in material of this sort and will want to become concerned with it. On the other hand, he will not be motivated to learn subject matter which has no such significance for him. If such material is taught through methods employing extrinsic motivation it will be perceived by him as being valueless in itself, will tend to be poorly learned and quickly forgotten.
When the many values that are inherent in learning which is motivated by deep interest are contrasted with the unpleasant consequences of attempts to teach uninteresting subject matter, the educational significance of interest is thrown into sharp contrast, raising the question of why interest does not play a more significant role in modern educational practice.

**Mental health.** Mental health may be thought of as the psychological state of the individual who is successfully achieving an adequate degree of self-enhancement by virtue of the activities in which he is engaged. Since interest is an important aspect of the process through which self-enhancement is achieved, it plays an important role in bringing about mental health.

Active involvement in the identification and nurturing of interests may enable a person to broaden and deepen his self-understanding. It may also serve to increase his knowledge of the environment in which he lives as well as his skills in manipulating that environment in terms of his own needs. Such involvement may also build his self-confidence and self-respect. On each of these levels, active concern with his interests may contribute to the individual's mental health by enabling him to achieve ever greater self-preservation and enhancement.
The "Health" of Interests

Interests may be termed "healthy" or "unhealthy" depending upon whether they serve to enable the individual to grow toward greater self-realization and enhancement or to block his healthy development. The contribution an interest makes or may potentially make to the person's well-being is the criterion by which its state of "health" may be determined.

In making judgments in terms of this criterion, one must employ the greatest of caution. Only after gaining clear insight into a student's psychological situation may a teacher make an intelligent decision as to the function of a particular interest in a young person's life. Frequently, an interest which on the surface appears to be unhealthy may, upon investigation, turn out to make an important contribution to the individual's well-being.

The unhealthy interest. Unhealthy interests may develop—as do healthy interests—as a result of the person's attempt to achieve self-enhancement. However, because of an incomplete and distorted self-concept and/or deficient environmental conditions, those interests which the individual does locate may result in harm rather than in his well-being.

Although unhealthy interests should be discouraged,
it may be of even greater importance to make it possible for young persons to develop healthy interests. Too often, unhealthy interests arise by default, as a result of environmental conditions which are lacking in capacity to stimulate healthy interests. A consideration of the consequences of the interest vacuum in which many young people live serves to underline the responsibility of the school in encouraging the identification and nurturing of healthy interests on the part of its students.

Since anti-social behavior may have its origin in the expression of unhealthy interests, society has a vital stake in programs which are devoted to the encouragement of healthy interests.

**Interest and the Democratic Objectives**

The obligation to respect the personality of each individual human being stands at the foundation of the democratic philosophy. This objective may find expression through the provision of activities which enable the individual to develop his various potentialities and which allow him to take over greater responsibility for achieving self-preservation and enhancement.

Respect for personality entails a knowledge of the person's phenomenal field, for it is in accordance with his view of the world that the person initiates behavior.
Such understanding may be most fully achieved if an empathic relationship can be established with the person.

Respect for interests. Respect for an individual's internal world necessitates respect for his interests. Indeed, respect for personality would be somewhat meaningless unless it included respect for the individual's perceptions of the world, especially his perceptions of those aspects of his environment which enable him to achieve self-preservation and enhancement, i.e., his interests.

As the person is encouraged to take the initiative in identifying and nurturing interests of deep significance, he is provided with an opportunity to become responsible for his own growth and to become ever more effective in serving his own general well-being.

Learner responsibility. In a democracy, self-direction and self-government are highly valued. The democratic citizen is, indeed, expected to participate to the fullest extent in the determination of matters which affect his own welfare. The more practice the person has in identifying his interests and in dealing with them successfully, the more able he will be to work with others on the identification and nurturing of commonly shared or group interests--an essential aspect of the democratic
group process.

**Appropriate outlets.** If the nurturing of individual interests is to be encouraged, students must be able to locate appropriate interest outlets. Whether a group or an individual project will be more appropriate to a given interest will depend upon the extent to which the interest is shared and upon the degree to which each type of project will enable the interest to find expression. Factors extraneous to interest should not be permitted to interfere with a student's opportunities to nurture significant interests in appropriate interest outlets.

**Student Interests and the Curriculum**

The relevance of student interest to the curriculum may be examined in regard to both the content and the process of the educational experience. In terms of content, an important issue concerns the degree to which subject matter should be selected in terms of the recognized interests of students. The extent to which student interests determine the nature of the curriculum content will, in turn, affect the teaching methods employed.

**Interest and the selection of subject matter.** When interesting subject matter is selected to begin with, the students will be intrinsically motivated and the teacher
may devote his energy to efficient teaching. In this situation, questions of discipline or of "making subject matter interesting" are irrelevant and both teachers and students may gain intrinsic satisfaction from the experience.

When, however, little consideration is given to student interests in the selection of content, a much greater burden is put upon the teacher. In this case, his major energy may have to be expended in the task of "making subject matter interesting," an objective which may frequently be impossible to achieve.

**Interest and Method**

Making subject matter interesting consists of establishing conditions within which learners come to perceive a significant relationship between the subject matter being considered and their own well-being. Regardless of the personality of the teacher or the novelty of his presentation, unless the student sees such a relationship, interest is not present.

In attempting to arouse deep interest, the teacher should, in the course of his presentation of new material, look for signs of incipient interest on the part of his students. When such signs do appear, he should take appropriate action.
Often this may mean "stopping the music," i.e., discontinuing the presentation of new material in order to pursue topics which have stimulated special interest. Although such a practice may break the orderly sequence of presentation, it may, on the other hand, lead to the development of deep interest, at least in regard to certain aspects of the subject.

**Following-up interests.** Whether or not students become really interested in new subject matter may not depend so much on the quantity to which they are exposed as it does on the extent to which interests that are aroused are followed-up. Frequently, interest is ignited in the course of subject matter presentation and then quickly extinguished when the teacher moves on to other matters. The very act of hurrying on to other material may work against the arousal of real depth of interest.

If interest is to be nurtured, teachers must be ready to build upon it whenever it appears. Such moments of learning readiness, moments when the students are vitally interested, if passed over, may never occur again. The degree of interest which is achieved, indeed, the quality of the learning that occurs, may well depend upon the teacher's ability to capitalize upon such moments of readiness.
Perhaps the most significant type of interest is that which is stimulated when the student perceives the subject matter as contributing to the development of his emerging life theme interests. The school should take steps toward increasing the incidence of such occasions.

The School's Responsibility in Regard to Interest

In general, what happens in school may influence the interests of students in a positive manner by arousing new interests or by nurturing and encouraging interests which are already present. It may also have a negative influence, serving to discourage the arousal of new interests or block the development and expression of interests which already exist. Which of these functions, positive or negative, will be emphasized, will depend upon the school's educational aims and upon how it perceives student interests in relation to these aims.

Developing Individual Interests. If the assumption made in this project is accepted, namely, that the identification and nurturing of healthy individual interests on the part of young people is a means of expressing the democratic obligation to respect personality, then the school should make provision for the development of such unique individual interests.

A program of this sort should include the following:
1. Making provision for the richest possible learning environment as a background from which the interests of young people may emerge. Subject matter presentation as well as other educational experiences provide the raw material out of which new interests may be fashioned.

2. Making provision for the nurturing of healthy student interests once they have emerged, regardless of the place of their origin. Interest in subject areas, arising either within or outside of class may be nurtured through individual or group projects under the guidance of the subject teacher. Interests that are not relevant to the subject areas may be nurtured in special interest projects under the guidance of a teacher serving as an "interest consultant." When students develop interest which might best be expressed through some community outlet other than the school, they should be advised accordingly.

The provision of means by which interests may be nurtured is a continuing school responsibility throughout the young person's stay in school. Significant interests should be viewed in their long term, developmental aspect, as potential Life Theme Interests, and should be followed-up as the youngster moves through each step of the educational ladder.

3. In a democracy, great value is placed on self-government and self-determination. It therefore becomes
an objective of the school to encourage students to take
ever greater responsibility in identifying and nurturing
their own interests. As students learn to take the
initiative in formulating and carrying out projects which
enable them to achieve their own well-being, they are at
the same time developing skills of importance to the
democratic citizen.

II. SOME GENERAL AND ACTION HYPOTHESES

Many hypotheses have been introduced and considered
within the context of the preceding chapters. The present
task is to restate several of these hypotheses which seem
to have special educational significance. By listing them
in one place, their relatedness may perhaps be more clearly
indicated.

General Hypotheses

The several hypotheses that have been formulated
cover the range from general to specific. Those of a more
general nature, when taken as a whole, may be thought of as
embracing a tentative theory of the relevance of student
interest to education. They suggest a conceptual framework
which relates student interests to educational objectives
on the one hand, and to educational practice on the other.

A general hypothesis around which much of the
project is constructed may be stated in the following terms: If student interests are employed in curriculum development—within a democratic framework—healthy growth will be facilitated.

This hypothesis is based upon several more specific assumptions:

1. Respect for human personality—a basic democratic imperative—may be expressed through the facilitation of a person's general growth and well-being.

2. Healthy growth and well-being may be facilitated through the individual's development of persistent and significant interests (Life Theme Interests).

3. Healthy psychological growth and well-being may be facilitated by enabling individuals to accept ever greater responsibility for their own learning experiences.

Combining the reasoning of these assumptions, the central study hypothesis may be reworded: If the school provides opportunities for students to (1) develop Life Theme Interests and (2) take greater responsibility in so doing, then healthy growth will be facilitated.

A further hypothesis may be suggested: If students are to develop Life Theme Interests, the school should (1) provide students with opportunities in which to locate new interests and (2) make provision for students to nurture the healthy interests which they have located.
Employing these general hypotheses and assumptions as a theoretical background, it is possible to formulate action hypotheses.

**Action Hypotheses**

In addition to the general hypotheses are others of a more specific character. Such hypotheses which indicate definite activities or "actions" by the means of which educational practitioners might achieve their objectives may be termed "action hypotheses."

Although such hypotheses specify action, they are in a rough form as presented here. They still must be tailored to the particular situations in which they will be used before they are ready to be employed as the basis for action research. They are presented here as suggestions upon which "true" action hypotheses may be based.

**Arousal of Interests.** This aspect of the school's task may be covered by a single hypothesis: The richer the educational environment to which the student is exposed, the greater his chances of locating new interests.

The breadth of experiences of all types, the variety of subject matter to which students are exposed, determine the environmental background, the raw material out of which interests may arise. The more extensive and inclusive these experiences, the wider the student's chance to
locate interests of significance to him.

**Teacher identification of interests.** Since by definition, interest is a conscious process, the student will be aware of his interest as soon as it has been aroused. The teacher, however, is not aware of the existence of student interests until he has identified them, something he may have to do if he is to help students deal with them in an effective manner.

Several actions may be suggested by the means of which a teacher may identify student interests:

1. Establishing a classroom atmosphere in which students feel free to share information regarding their interests.

2. Providing class time for work on interests.

3. Making the class an object of study.
   a) Administering interest tests.
   b) Observing the general behavior of students.
      (1) What they do in their free time.
      (2) What they select for free reading material.
   c) Listening to student conversations.
      (1) During free moments.
      (2) During formal class activities.
   d) Studying the content of student products such as compositions, test papers, expressive creations and interest projects.

4. Noting overt signs of interest during class sessions.
a) A desire to raise questions on a certain matter.
b) A desire to continue a discussion on a particular subject.
c) A desire to get more information on a certain subject.

5. Getting to know students as individuals.
   a) Conducting personal interviews.
   b) Participating in common group experiences.

Related to these hypotheses on identification is another concerning the failure of the teacher to identify student interests: If the teacher fails to identify the student interests which are present, the future development of these interests may be left to chance; the school may lose its opportunity to guide these interests toward healthy development.

**Dealing with aroused interests.** Once an interest has been identified by a teacher, it becomes possible for him to deal with it. In general, the teacher may serve either to encourage or discourage the development of that interest.

It may be hypothesized that the basic criterion by which the worth or "health" of an interest may be determined, is the contribution that it makes or may potentially make to the individual's general well-being. This may be expressed in the following statements:
1. A healthy interest is one which contributes to the growth and general well-being of the individual.

2. An unhealthy interest is one which blocks or distorts an individual's growth or otherwise results in harm to his general state of well-being.

Before a teacher attempts to deal with an interest, he should have a rather clear concept of whether or not the interest has potentialities of being healthy for the individual. Only after gaining insight into the student's total psychological situation may it be possible for a teacher to make a valid judgment as to the function that a particular interest may have in the life of that person.

**Encouraging interest development.** The encouragement of healthy interests is based on the assumption that the development of such interests will result in wholesome growth on the part of the person. The following actions may enable the teacher to encourage the development of healthy student interests:

1. Make provision for work on interests during class time.

2. Encourage students to concern themselves with matters which are of interest to them.

3. Communicate the attitude that it is good and proper to have and to deal with one's unique individual interests.

4. Help students locate or create appropriate outlets for the expression of their interests.
   
   a) Make provision for individual interest projects when such projects are appropriate.
b) Provide for group interest projects when several students share the same interest.

c) Provide for the entire class to develop projects around interests which are shared by all or a majority of the students.

5. Make work on interests an integral part of the curriculum, not an "extra" added to an already complete program.

6. Make resources available to students as they carry on their interest projects (sources of information, resource persons, facilities).

7. Take advantage of student readiness by dealing with student interests while they are still actively aroused.

   a) When the entire class indicates active interest, be prepared to "stop the music" and to deal with the matter as a class activity.

   b) Enable individual students to follow-up interests that are aroused in the course of class activities.

8. Provide for the longitudinal development of interests by enabling students to continue to work upon their interests as they move up the educational ladder.

Discouraging unhealthy interests. Just as the school has a responsibility to aid the development of healthy interests, it may have a similar duty to discourage or block the development of undesirable or unhealthy interests.

Unhealthy interests frequently arise through default, in a vacuum left by the absence of healthy interests. It may be hypothesized, therefore, that the discouragement of unhealthy interests should be accompanied or preceded by
efforts to encourage healthy interests. Unless this is done, attempts to discourage undesirable interests may have little effect—the possibility of the young person finding alternative interests to replace those which are being discouraged will be lacking. Suppression by itself, therefore, may only result in strengthening the young person's urge to nurture his undesirable interest.

Since the characterization of interests as "unhealthy" is a difficult task, the discouragement of interests should proceed with caution, it should follow careful study of the total situation in which the interest functions.

Discouraging healthy interests. In general, healthy interests should be encouraged and unhealthy interests discouraged. In practice, however, both healthy and unhealthy interests are frequently blocked or discouraged by school procedures.

Since the discouragement of healthy interests may result in undesirable consequences, practices which serve this function require a thorough reexamination. The following actions may enable the teacher to locate practices which tend to discourage healthy interest development:

1. Examine the students' time schedules. Note how
much time is made available during the school day for work on interests. Is adequate time made available?

2. Study class procedures. Note how interest is dealt with when it appears in the midst of a class activity. Is it actively or passively discouraged, ignored?

3. Study the teachers' time schedule. Note how much free time they have during which they may help students work on their interests. Do time limitations allow adequate opportunities in which teachers may encourage student interest development?

4. Study the use of school facilities. Note how frequently they are made available to students for work on their interests. Are they available when needed to nurture student interests?

5. Explore teacher attitudes toward the educational significance of dealing with student interests. Do teachers consider it wise, practical, possible to deal positively with student interest?

6. Study teacher knowledge of the interests of their students. Note how they define the term, whether they attempt to study student interest, etc. Do they take an active interest in identifying the interests of their students?
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