

# Educating Emotions Prevents Juvenile Delinquency

By Dorothy Thompson

**A** FEW DAYS before the discontinuance of the ancient Third Avenue El in New York, I decided, for old times' sake, to take a last ride on it.

I climbed the stairs to board at a midtown station, shortly after three in the afternoon. No one was on the platform except the elderly ticket seller and a dozen youths from a nearby high school. They were traveling on passes, free transportation furnished public-school pupils, and their behavior was atrocious.

The ticket seller asked them to line up to show their passes. This they refused to do, shoving, crowding, and shouting at

one another at the top of their lungs.

He spoke to one girl who had crowded through, saying, "Please come back and show your pass."

"I showed you my pass," she screamed back.

"I'm sorry, but you didn't," the old man said.

Now, still screaming reiteratively that she had shown it to "the old dope," she flashed the pass through the wicket and banged it on the old man nose, shouting, "There's your pass for you!"

Their uptown train came in, and they galloped aboard. I was going through the downtown

gate, but had time again to observe their faces. They wore an expression of extreme aggressiveness. Not one looked happy. In none was there an expression of interest or affection.

"Excuse me," I said to the ticket seller. "Are they always like that?"

"Usually worse," he said bitterly. "I'm scared of three o'clock. I have the feeling they might kill me — just for a joke."

It was a small incident, but I was unable to dismiss it from my mind.

A few weeks before (a boy of fifteen had been shot dead in a New York street by a seventeen-year old youth who believed him to be a member of a rival gang. When the murderer was arrested two teen-aged girl onlookers had cheered him as a hero. The papers were full of such stories, I had seen nothing on the station but a display of bad manners.

But beyond the bad manners, it was that facial expression that disturbed me.

I knew what the ticket seller meant. It was frightening in itself.

The wearers of this expression, whether they know it or not, belong to a tiny privileged group of the more than two billion people who inhabit this planet, for only a small fraction of mankind has access to educa-

tion above the primary grades, and millions not even that.

THESE youths of fourteen to eighteen are not working as most of their grandparents were, helping to "pay their own way." The municipality is paying their way; they don't even have to trudge on foot to school.

They have, "free for nothing," access to centuries of human culture; great museums housing two millenia of art; the finest music for the turn of a dial or the adjustment of a record; libraries in which the wit and wisdom of ages are stored.

The President of the United States speaks to them on television; talented actors perform for them in their own homes; a vast entertainment business caters to their tastes; a multimillion-dollar clothing business dresses them within the budgets of their parents' income more lavishly than any youth except a small class of the rich have ever been dressed before.

Great scientific enterprises work day and night to guard them from diseases. Youth clubs are organized in and out of school to provide for their recreation. In the great cities an ever-increasing number of them live in modern apartments, furnished with every convenience, with part of the rent paid by the community.

Public parks and playgrounds are at their disposal.

They are, in fact, by any standards, in any time, "lords of creation."

Yet all this, which comes to them from others, they take for granted, as a "right", and if it is not granted, feel, and are called, "underprivileged." None of it moves them to gratitude, or awakens in them a sense of reciprocity toward society.

That the fatherly old ticket seller, calling for their passes, is, in fact, a cog in a mechanism operating for their benefit, and a fellow human being, is unrecognized.

The public parks must be policed against vandalism, and their shadows are jungles for gangs preying upon each other.

Anyone who takes the trouble daily to compile from any great metropolis newspaper reports of legal misdemeanors and crimes committed by minors will be appalled at what he accumulates in a month, and national and local statistics enlarge the story. Whenever a peculiarly savage and senseless crime occurs, the public is mobilized; calls are issued for more law-enforcement agencies, more public expenditures for youth clubs, better co-ordination of social agencies, and the appointment of a new committee. Citizens assess the causes; the schools blame homes and churches; the parents blame the schools; the sociologists blame "living conditions," and so ad in-

finitum, in a circle that only gets back to where it started.

Yet I submit that the fault lies primarily in one place: in education; and that the basic fault is a misconception of the *purpose* of education, and the means by which it can be effected.

This misconception rests on the thesis that knowledge is the source of power, in the individual and in a society; that a sufficiently "informed" population is capable of satisfactory self-government; that conduct is primarily controlled by reason; and that the purpose of education is to create "individuals efficient in their own interest."

**9** PUT this phrase in quotation marks because it is not mine.

Fully a generation ago I read a book by the British sociologist, Benjamin Kidd, called *The Science of Power*. It was written during the early stage of the First World War and is long out of print. I only lately re-obtained the volume, which had been borrowed from me and not returned.

Benjamin Kidd observed, then, the growing savagery in Western society—the savagery of class and international conflicts, the ever-increasing savagery of war and the ever growing cult of naked force, accompanying enormous material and scientific progress. He believed



the eventual result would be the decline and fall of Western civilization, in which prediction he was by no means alone.

*Power in a society, he declared—the force that makes for survival—rests upon the transmission and improvement of the cultural inheritance, and this transmission and refinement is not accomplished by the training of the individual intellect, the inculcation of skills or the arguments of reason, but by the “emotion of the ideal,” awakened in very small children—in whom he believed it was inherent and natural — and cultivated to maturity. The ideal is “other-regarding” emotion, that subordinates the interests of the individual to the interests*

*of the community; the interest to succeed to the interest to achieve; the interest to get to the impulse to give; the interest of the present to the interest of the future; the instinct of aggression to the instinct of altruistic protectiveness.*

The child, in short, cannot be made a worthy member of society by appeals to his self-interest; he cannot be rendered immune to aggressive urges by indoctrination that “crime does not pay.” He is not made good or bad by external material living conditions; or by a greater or lesser amount of intellectual training; or by a higher or lower I. Q. His actions and attitudes as a child largely determine his actions and attitudes

as an adult. But these are not inspired by his brain, but by his feelings. He becomes what he is encouraged and trained to love, admire, worship, cherish, and sacrifice for.

*This training cannot be inculcated by appeals to self-interest, by fear of discipline, by preachings, or by ambition for individual recognition as someone above and apart from human society. The affectionate instincts which preclude aggressiveness grow in response to affection and out of the desire to be loved, which means to be honored.*

*In all this manners play an important role, for good manners are nothing more or less than the expression of consideration for others.*

It is futile to tell a child that earliest age into attitude or posture of respect. Schools that insist on classes' standing when teacher enters the room do not do so for the sake of the teacher's prestige, but for the sake of the children. The teacher is to be respected for herself and her function.

To say that education must encourage individual "self-expression" begs the question. What kind of "self-expression"? The first expressions that need to be engendered are those of courage, industry and helpfulness. The desire to help is present in nearly every small child. A toddler will say, "Me help

mummy." Only too often his help is impatiently rejected as impending rather than contributing to performing the task, but in rejecting it a creative societal impulse is being suppressed in the child.

A modern catchword is, "The child does not exist for the school, but the school for the child." A little thought expose the fatuity of this slogan. The school is an institution of the community and exists to serve it; to transfer to the child its highest ideals, and so guide, train and enlighten him that he will, as a member of the community, cherish its highest ideals, emulate its best behaviors, protect its safety, feel a duty for its well-being, and thus ensure its freedoms and its survival as the condition of his own freedoms and survival.

The freer the society, the more dispersed its powers, the more essential is the development of its personal and social character.

*The school is the child's first encounter with society, and its primary task is to help him to become socially acceptable and socially creative. Apart from society the "individual" has no meaningful existence. But society is not the sum total of the individuals comprising it, at any moment. It is a continuity that they inherit and carry on.*

They do not inherit it as individuals, through their genes—

but as part of a general consciousness and conscience regarding what is beautiful, true admirable, and worthy to be cherished and emulated; in short, of what is good for mankind. All societies have their more and moralities or they are not human societies but jungles. The first function of education is, therefore, not to turn out better or worse laborers, housewives, stenographers, mathematicians, engineers, and so on—each activity representing but one function of a human person—but to send on their way new members of the community who, through their characters (largely conditioned by emotional response), will contribute something over and above whatever they do for a living.

Society is transcendent to the individual. Apart from purely biological inheritances, it creates the individual. The societal impulses alone preserve society and through society the individual. "No man is an island unto himself."

**A**LL CRIME, in whatever category, consists of only one thing: malicious offense against a fellow human being or beings. *Those who merely hurt the feelings of others without feeling uncomfortable themselves are in an emotional condition to commit graver misdemeanors. Courtesy—a "mere" matter of manners—is an ex-*

*pression of the "other-regarding" emotion.* Internal feelings are reflected in external behavior, but external behavior also contributes to the cultivation of internal feelings. It is hard to feel aggressive while acting considerately. Good manners may be only skin deep to start with, but they seldom remain so.

Children are imitative. Rude, quarrelsome and violent parents are likely to have children of similar behavior. But the home alone does not condition the emotional behavior of the child, who, above all, imitates his contemporaries and those adults whom they, as a group, admire. The school has the advantage over the home in that it is a society of children. Their emotional response to that society will determine their later emotional response to the world at large. Only the stimulation of the emotion of the ideal in very small children, where it exists latently, will create a society approaching the ideal: a society instinctively protective; one that does not invite aggression by aggressiveness, but will *instinctively* defend against aggression, not out of hate but out of love.

If we looked back upon our own, what teachers do we remember—or *what* about them do we remember? The lessons they taught us, well or ill?

*We remember only the teachers we loved, only those whose characters we instinctively respected and emulated. It seems to me that far too much emphasis is put today upon pedagogical training, especially for teachers in primary schools, and far too little upon selection for character.*

It also seems to me that too much importance is attributed to intelligence tests as placing children in educable or uneducable categories. The child with an I.Q. of 69 is not, as an individual, going to make the mark in the world that the child with an I.Q. of 30 may. But he may be just as good a human being. For goodness and badness, with rare exceptions — like sanity and insanity—are not conditioned by the brain but by the emotions. Our prisons and insane asylums are filled with people who have nothing wrong with their brains but whose emotions are deranged and whose societal impulses have never been cultivated or have gone awry.

No country is more health-conscious than ours, and particularly of the health of child-

ren. We are concerned about their nutrition and have developed it into a science; hundreds of millions of dollars are readily obtainable for research, especially into the diseases that affect children. And this is all very well. *But penal institutions are nevertheless filled with well-nourished inmates. Four times as many people die each year from bullet wound as are lost from polio; and more hospital beds are required for mental cases than for any other one disease.* Criminals become so not from hardening of the arteries but from hardening of the heart, and few cases of insanity have direct pathological causes; the overwhelming majority are due to emotional derangements of frustrated egos.

Society can protect itself only if its educational institutions foster the protective, other-regarding emotions in children.

The insights for such a development seldom come out of the pedagogy books. They are the insights of all great religious teachers; of those who have concerned themselves to create good people in a good society.

\* \* \*