

Instincts in Children

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Editorial

INTRODUCTION

Observation of children in controlled and uncontrolled settings leads to believe that every action and activity of children is driven by instincts. Man and animals are instinctive by nature. Instincts are uncontrollable urges that drives living beings towards a complicated behaviour. In the behavioural sciences instinct is generally understood as the innate part of behaviour that emerges without any training or education in humans. Spink^[1] behaviours such as cooperation, sexual behaviour, child rearing and aesthetics are seen as 'evolved psychological mechanisms' with an instinctive basis^[2-4]. Instincts are great dynamic forces of human nature which determine the character, life and behaviour of the individual. An instinctive act is not a purely biological act. It is a physical act. It is not simply an inherited arrangement of nervous acts but a mental process with three -fold aspects, cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Woodworth^[5] called instincts "unlearned motives". According to him instinctive actions are racial habits. Mc Douglass^[6] said, "An inherited or innate psychophysical disposition which determines its possessor to perceive and to pay attention to objects if a certain class to experience an emotional excitement of a particular quality upon perceiving such an object and to act in regard to it in a particular manner or at least to experience an impulse to such action. According to him an instinct is a complete mental process -cognitive, affective and conative. These are neither imitated nor learned but are innate. They are neither voluntary nor habitual actions. It is not a reflex action which is simple and immediate but is a complex response lasting for a longer period of time. Woodworth^[5] said "An instinct is an activity which involves an individual to deal competently with the environment without previous experience and practice'. Emotion is an affective experience that one undergoes during an instinctive excitement. McDougall^[6] discovered 14 basic instincts and concluded that each and every emotion whatever it may be is the product of some instinctive behaviour, emotional experiences are associated with some instincts or biological drives every emotional experience is associated with one or other innate instinct. An emotion is aroused under the influence of an instinctive excitement. one can experience emotion of anger only after riding on the instinctive waves of pugnacity or anger.

KIND OF INSTINCTS

- Some instinctive acts like acquisition, food-seeking instincts are adapted to self-preservation.
- The sex instinct, the maternal instinct etc., are adapted to race preservation.
- Defensive instincts are constructiveness, flight and secretiveness.
- Aggressive instincts like gregariousness, sympathy, jealousy, envy.

Characteristics of Instincts

- Instincts are universal. All living beings including man have them.
- Instincts are inborn tendencies.
- Instincts are racial characters.
- Every instinct appears at a period of growth, matures and weakens.
- Each instinct involves both body and mind with cognitive, conative and affective aspects for operation.

A FEW CONFLICTS FOUND GENERALLY IN CHILDREN

Instinct of Combat

It is not aroused by any single object or class of objects but by a large number of different situations which may have at least one common characteristic. It is aroused by interference in the pursuit of goal. A child strives for getting rid of the obstruction. The thwart in the first phase makes him attack. Dishonesty, tyranny, selfishness and falsehood arouse in the child to combat ^[5,6].

Instinct of Curiosity

It is aroused by strange and unfamiliar objects and the accompanying emotion is wonder. The child approaches and examines to know more about them. Curiosity is essentially one of suspended judgement and that is the beginning of wisdom, questioning, further examination and explicit judgement. But if the objects are too strange and unfamiliar the child either fears and shuns them or is altogether indifferent to them. Hence a teacher has to care to connect the new facts with the previous lessons. Instruction in primary classes for most part should deal with the concrete and the sensory which they can see, touch, handle or manipulate and teach even the general ideals through concrete facts of experience which are familiar to children, to arouse healthy and vigorous curiosity. Otherwise curiosity may wrongly develop into idle inquisitiveness asking questions just for the fun of asking and probing into other affairs. This instinct is to be properly channelized to develop constructive thinking, imagination and judgement but not to be suppressed or curbed.

Instinct of Appeal

When the instinct of combat fails to attend its goal, appeal is aroused. In giving a cry of distress, the impulse is to gain aid, help and comfort from others, primarily from parents. In giving a cry of distress, the impulse is to gain aid, help and comfort from others, primarily from parents.

Instinct of Construction

The instinct of construction is the hunger of the hand. This is vague in the early stage and is expressed in random movements in which there is no difference between making and breaking or constructing and destroying things. There is a shift from tearing purposes, piling blocks of wood and scattering to make things with sand, clay, paper, wood and what not. Different crafts provide for exercise and development of this instinct of construction. It also provides for creative work.

Instinct of Acquisition

At a very early stage child show eagerness not only to know and manipulate things but also to acquire and possess them. Babies refusal to share the toys, children's collection of pins, leaves, feathers, labels, etc. at a later stage acquisition of more and more knowledge, fame, honor, degrees in adulthood are driven by the same urge to acquire and own. Collection in children can be encouraged as a hobby and make it educationally valuable by making them to know, inquire and investigate further about the collected objects. Otherwise, they remain only as pure amusement.

Self-Assertion and Self-Abasement

In the presence of inferior fellow creatures there is an instinctive desire to display strength or superiority in some direction. This is assertion of self which is accompanied by the emotion of elation. In the presence of superior fellow beings, the attitude is one of respect and submission which is due to self-abasement. It is accompanied by the emotion of subjection and submission. These two instincts are aroused in relation to fellow beings. A child learns for the pleasure of showing to others what he can do. He seeks the esteem and approbation of others. It causes much of our permanent endeavours. This may also lead to self-consciousness and pride. They may seek to display themselves in undesirable directions and develop anti-social-traits. The naughty child, the bully and the tyrant are the products of self-display. Hence proper opportunities in schools are to be provided for this self-display. Numerous co-curricular activities give a large scope to a majority of pupils. Social activities, self-government and social service programmes give young people a growing sense of power and channelize them into healthy social activities.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- Healthy atmosphere in school and class which is conducive for the right expression of instinctive behaviours.
- A wide range of curricular and co-curricular activities can also provide for the satisfaction of various instincts.
- Redirection of psychic energy of instincts is socially acceptable and more constructive.

- Sublimation of instinctive energy through yoga rather than the repression of instinctive desires.
- Utilisation of innate tendencies for fruitful development rather than disuse of them and their energy provides for human resource development.
- Control of instinctive tendencies inhibits child's behaviour. Hence they have to be directed and utilised by teachers.

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