

Book Reviews



Developing Attitude Toward Learning. By Robert F. Mager, 1968.
Available from Fearon Publishers, Palo Alto, California 94306. 104
pp. \$2.00.

Want to send your educational audiences away from your instruction anxious to use what you taught them and eager to learn more? Mager makes this kind of challenge in helping the reader to look at what the teacher does in providing learning experiences for the learner. He says that "One of the important goals of teaching is to prepare the student to *use* the skills and knowledge he has learned and to prepare him to *learn more* about the subjects he has been taught. One way of reaching this goal is to send the student away from the learning experience with a tendency to approach, rather than avoid, the subject of study."

Although written primarily for the classroom teacher, the book offers a wealth of ideas that apply to teaching-learning experiences common to most Extension personnel. The point of focus is that people develop attitudes about the things they are doing and that others influence these attitudes. A favorably developed attitude is likely to move a person towards a subject area and a negative attitude to move him away. If we substitute *behavior* for *attitude*, then we could say that people developed approach responses and avoidance responses depending on how they react in learning experiences. The author discusses ways to observe, record, and evaluate both types of responses.

People are influenced by the conditions that surround the subject, the consequences of coming in contact with the subject, and the ways that others react towards a subject (modeling). The author emphasizes the need to take a look at what we are doing that affects these three areas. Are the conditions such that the learner has a pleasant experience?

What are the consequences of his experience? Do we set a good example (modeling) with the learning experience we provide?

Some of the aversive conditions or consequences that cause avoidance responses are common; such conditions as pain, fear, anxiety, frustration, humiliation, embarrassment, boredom, and physical discomfort are avoided if we feel that contact with a learning experience might produce them. Likewise, reinforcement, increment instruction, knowing the objectives, personal attention, student involvement in planning, and others provide positive conditions or consequences for the learner. Why do we bother with what some would say is elementary? Mager feels that good intentions are not enough; we must do more if we want to send the student away with at least as much interest in a subject as when he came.

Where am I going? How shall I get there? How will I know I've arrived? These are the questions that the author answers in regards to developing attitudes towards learning. He says that there are enough aversion-producing instruments in the world—we professional instructors must not be numbered among them.

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For Adults Only: A Lifetime of Learning. By R. Wayne Shute *et al.*, 1968. Available from the Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah. 206 pp. \$3.50.

The book begins with a conceptualization of learning as eternal. Shute suggests that "there is a kind of eternal evolution where just as man progresses in this life from the simple to the complex and from the slow to the fast so will this process continue throughout the eternities." Thus, learning that is devoted only to earthly tasks has less meaning than that which contemplates the eternal.

The remainder of Part I (which responds to the question of "why learn?") cites such exigencies as the explosion of knowledge and the problems of communism, decay of the family unit, urbanization, poverty, intellectualism, and materialism as ample reasons why American adults can not afford to engage in anything less than life-long learning. The author concludes that learning experienced solely for the reason of pleasure can be equally if not more satisfying than learning motivated strictly by functional purpose.

Part II focuses upon the individual adult and suggests that by understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, by developing an appropriate attitude toward purposeful learning, and by continuously striving for excellence one can readily take advantage of the infinite learning opportunities that constantly prevail. For example, Shute notes that adults

have an advantage over youth in experience, purpose, and immediate utility when engaged in learning activities. Thus, whatever the adult loses in physical attributes due to the process of aging he tends to counterbalance by an increasing efficiency in learning and a growing intellectual capacity. However, it is noted that an emotional reaction to such "falsehoods" as absent-mindedness and decreasing capability to learn has created a barrier to learning for many adults.

Part III treats various skills of learning, e.g., creative thinking and obstacles to its achievement, reinforced learning, the figure-alphabet system and random association and organization, and skills of listening and reading.

For Adults Only: A Lifetime of Learning was apparently prepared and presented as a general interest contribution to the literature of adult education. Seemingly directed toward an adult reading audience, as the title implies, the book has particular significance to the person who desires to gain insights about and opportunity to reflect upon aspects of "lifetime learning" as a growing imperative.

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Behavioral Science Concepts in Case Analysis: The Relationship of Ideas to Management Action. By Renato Tagiuri *et al.*, 1968. Available from Harvard Business School, Boston, Massachusetts 02163. 147 pp. \$4.00.

As the title of this book implies, an attempt is made to use concepts as a means of helping to better understand the application of theory to practice. The authors explain how concepts, taken from the behavioral sciences, can be used by the "man of action"—in this case the managerial level in business. Two case studies of business corporations provide the basis for showing the "potentials of the behavioral sciences for the conduct of practical affairs."

The authors point out the value of behavioral science concepts to the manager as he concerns himself with problems of human interaction. If a manager can learn to use analysis concepts he is more likely to consider human factors important to his situation. He is also more likely to consider or realize alternatives not previously considered as he searches for solutions to problems.

Several concepts are taken from the behavioral sciences to use in analyzing the case studies. The first study centers around a small group of top management in a food manufacturing industry. It focuses primarily on concepts referring to sociological processes, especially those

concerned with small groups. Specifically, the concepts of *equilibrium* and *primary task of the organization* are explored. In the process of dealing with these concepts several more are introduced for analysis purposes. The danger here is that the analysis involves so much sociological "jargon" and terminology that the reader might get lost in the analysis procedure and miss the main purpose, that of application to reality. The conclusions, however, help to put the case study back into perspective.

The concepts of *values*, *role*, and *attitude change* are the primary items of analysis in the second case study. These familiar concepts are analyzed as they apply to the human element in an economic setting and are further refined for purposes of more detailed application. For example, *role conflict* and *role interlocking* are both dealt with in the consideration of *role* in general. This, incidentally, is an illustration of the utility of learning by concepts. As is true of the first case study, the reader must be careful not to get so concerned with the analysis procedures that he loses the implications of applying theory to practice.

The authors make the point that it is not easy to develop a conceptual framework from the behavioral sciences for analyzing the on-going processes and relationships in an organization. They also admit that the predictive level is quite low, that is, that analyzing a complex social situation with a few behavioral science concepts does not permit accurate predictions about the outcome of that situation. However, as is true with other concepts that a manager has at his disposal (such as those from the areas of marketing, financing, control, etc.), they can be drawn upon when he feels that they will be helpful to him in a particular situation.

The value of this book to most Extension staff members is that it shows the potential of a meaningful method of dealing with the human factor, whether in an executive suite or a county Extension office. The method suggested is that of using behavioral science concepts to analyze human relationships. And, if human relationships are important to industry which has primarily economic goals, they are even more important to educators with human development objectives.

The book is perhaps not easy reading for a person without a background in the behavioral sciences. It should be quite useful to the student of conceptual learning or to the researcher in this field.

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MY IDEA of an agreeable person is a person who agrees with me.
—BENJAMIN DISRAELI