

Conflict Basic as Hunger?

Conflict may be a basic human drive like hunger or thirst and could be an important factor influencing the learning process

► PSYCHOLOGISTS often find themselves in the position of proving scientifically what people have always known implicitly.

So it is with new data on the value of conflict.

Conflict, a Canadian psychologist reported in *Scientific American*, 215:82, 1966, may be the same sort of driving force as hunger, thirst, sexual appetite and pain. If so, it can be placed among the ranks of those conditions which are most efficient in producing learning, with important implications for education.

All of the basic drives have in common the fact that they arouse the individual physically, sharpen his faculties, motivate him to act and enhance his learning capacity.

Conflict, when it arises from something complex, ambiguous, novel, puzzling or surprising, has not been considered a driving force in the same sense as pain.

But Dr. Daniel E. Berlyne, of the University of Toronto, and his collaborators in both the United States and Canada, have shown that conflict on a nonpainful level will arouse the body.

To prove this, Dr. Berlyne had a subject sit in front of a diamond-shaped

board with lights at each corner. Whenever the lights in any one corner went on, the subject had only to flip a key in that direction to turn them off.

When two corners were lighted, an element of conflict was introduced. Nothing adverse or painful happened to the subject, depending on which corner he chose to turn off, yet he became aroused. His galvanic skin response (a measurement of skin conductance used in lie detector tests) went up significantly under these conditions, Dr. Berlyne reported.

On the basis of this and other data, Dr. Berlyne believes that complexity, uncertainty and incongruity will—in themselves, not because they produce fear—arouse basic responses in an individual.

This research indicates that pointing out gaps or contradictions in a child's knowledge may be a solid teaching method. Heretofore, the technique of making a child insecure in his knowledge has not been viewed with favor.

Of course, if conflict is carried to the point of producing fear, arousal is so great that it blocks learning. This has been demonstrated elsewhere by studies of skid row children. Never knowing when the next blow will fall,

these children live in such dangerous uncertainty that they have a "nervous, on-the-go" quality, discharging tension every which way in aimless motions.

In his article, Dr. Berlyne observed that new information on conflict has broadened the concepts of "drive" and "motivation."

"We must recognize and study an entirely new spectrum" of motivations, he said, wherein conflict and uncertainty are basic stimulants to learning.

PSYCHOLOGY

Fantasy Games Aid Child's Emotional Growth

► GAMES of fantasy offer a means, perhaps the only one, by which little children communicate with each other and develop emotional depth, a Los Angeles psychoanalyst said recently.

The chance is fleeting. If missed in childhood, the adult may never have an opportunity to learn how to establish full, rich relationships with other people, believes Dr. Albert Schrut of the University of Southern California School of Medicine.

Healthy adults can simply state their feelings to one another, he noted, but a child is largely unaware of the emotions that others possess and only partially aware of his own.

By acting out a fantasy—pretending pain, terror, aggression, passivity—the child gives concrete expression to his feelings, and by responding to the pretense of playmates, he builds a bridge to the outside world. The feelings of others "become his to muse, to build and unbuild, to reproduce in part or in whole, to assimilate or reject, to examine and re-examine."

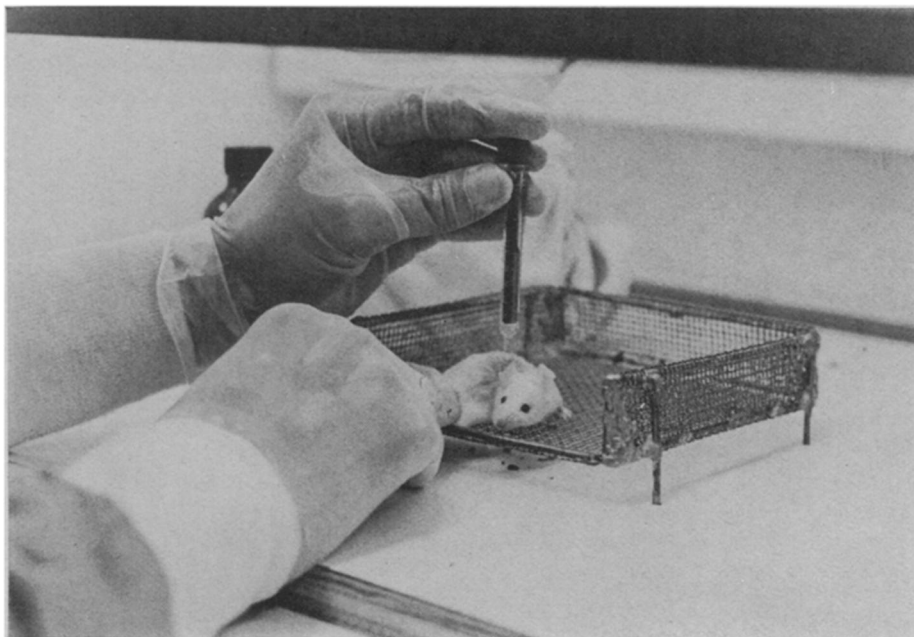
Dr. Schrut said that when the child cannot take leave of reality in these early years from two to six, his emotional and social development is often stunted. He cited a study of three-year-old children in a Boston slum as a case in point.

Exposed to violence, poverty and abandonment, these children were too taken up with reality to engage in fantasy play, or in fact, any play. They had to be constantly on the alert against the threats of everyday life. During rare periods when they handled toys, their actions were aimless and joyless.

Emotionally, these children were shallow, lacking personal warmth and imagination. A major breakthrough in reaching the children came in teaching them how to play, according to Dr. Charles Malone of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, Philadelphia, who conducted the study.

Essentially, this is the major thrust of the Government's Project Head Start. Rather than simply advancing formal education to preschool years, Head Start teaches children to play.

Dr. Schrut received a Southern California Psychoanalytic Society and Institute award for his paper, "The Importance of Play in Children."



Spindletop Research

RADICAL MOUSE—Twice a week a known amount of a free radical compound is applied to the skin of a mouse by technicians at the Spindletop Research Center, Lexington, Ky. A dozen different free radicals are being used in experiments to determine whether or not model free radicals will produce skin cancer on mice.