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# Identifying and responding to needs in education

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Do educators know what children need? Most of the school curriculum is supported by the assumption that educators and policymakers do indeed know what children need, and the curriculum is designed to satisfy these inferred needs. In trying to meet inferred needs, however, we often neglect the expressed needs of our students. Sometimes, of course, we rightly fear that expressed needs are mere momentary desires and that they should be curbed and replaced by the important needs we have already identified. But often, by ignoring expressed needs, we sacrifice opportunities to develop individual talents, intrinsic motivation, and the joys of learning. In this article, I explore the nature of needs and ways in which schools might better identify and respond to them. I start with a brief discussion of care ethics because it, in contrast to the dominant ethics of justice, gives attention to needs before moving on to matters of justice.

## Care ethics and needs

An ethic of care is needs-based. When I am one-caring in a situation, I am attentive—I listen to whatever needs are expressed—and, if possible, I try to respond positively (Noddings, 1984). Sometimes it is easy to do so. The one addressing me may want only a shared moment, directions to an office on campus, or something as simple as ‘please pass the salt’. There are times, however, when I cannot respond by meeting the expressed needs. I may not have the resources to do so, or I may believe it is not my place to fill the need, or I may mistakenly assess the need as a mere desire—even frivolous, or—in the worst case—I may judge the need to be harmful or immoral. In all cases, however—even the last—I try to respond in a way that will maintain the caring relation. It is not only the decision at hand that must be justified but also a future that depends on what I do now. It is not enough to make an ethically justified decision in a particular case such as firing an incompetent teacher or failing a lazy student. I must also consider how best to help the person who feels hurt by my decision. An ethic of care is, in this sense, future-oriented. Its work begins where an ethic of justice often ends.

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When I am the cared-for in a situation, I hope my need will be heard and, if not actually satisfied, at least treated with regard and understanding. My contribution to the caring relation is to signal that the caring has been received. Without that recognition, there is no caring relation, no matter how virtuous the carer may be in trying to respond to me. The possible conflict between expressed and inferred needs is apparent here. If my expressed needs are not treated positively, or at least sensitively, I will likely not feel cared for. Attempts to care frequently misfire this way. Would-be carers think they know what the cared-for needs and act on their inferences in the name of caring.

As care ethicists, we do not ignore or discount rights, but we believe that rights arise out of acknowledged needs (Noddings, 2002). There are times when people do not want the rights that generous advocates would thrust on them; they want, instead, to have their expressed needs heard and acknowledged. Internationally, powerful nations have made, and continue to make, this mistake repeatedly.

How are needs to be assessed? When should we respond by trying to satisfy an expressed need, and when should we gently try to dissuade the one who has expressed it? As we move along in this discussion, it will become obvious that assessing and responding to needs is one of the most difficult tasks faced by parents and teachers. When the student expresses one need and the teacher infers quite another for him or her, it can be hard to decide which need should be pursued. A teenager, for example, may express a need to learn a craft, while his parent infers a very different need for him—possibly (likely!) the need for solid preparation in academic mathematics. The underlying inferred need here is for the teenager to go to college, but the teen's own expressed need may be to become an apprentice in a field that does not require a traditional college education. A child may indicate a need to speak, while the teacher may believe that her real need is to listen. In general, teachers may infer a need for children to learn the standard school subjects, while children—through their behavior or verbalizations—express a need to learn how to live.

The distinction between expressed and inferred needs is important. An expressed need comes from the one expressing it, and it may be expressed in either words or behavior. An inferred need comes from someone other than the one said to have it. In the context of care ethics, an expressed need comes from the cared-for; an inferred need comes from one trying to care. Now, of course, there is almost always at least a low-level inference involved in interpreting an expressed need, but the sort of inferred needs in which I am interested here may be entirely independent from—even at odds with—particular expressed needs. A basic distinction has now been established, but we should refine it a bit.

### **Needs and wants**

It is not unusual to start educational theorizing with an analysis of needs. Ralph Tyler (1949) started his influential book on curriculum and instruction with a discussion of learners' needs. Tyler says this about needs:

Studies of the learner suggest educational objectives only when the information about the learner is compared with some desirable standards, some conception of acceptable norms, so that the difference between the present condition of the learner and the acceptable norm can be identified. This difference or gap is what is generally referred to as a need. (1949, p. 6)

Such needs are clearly inferred needs. Indeed, most of the needs identified by educators for learners may be classified as ‘inferred’ needs; that is, although they are said to be the ‘needs of the learners’, they are not needs expressed by the learners themselves.

Some needs are so nearly universal that we can safely infer them without their being expressed by any one individual, and Tyler recognizes these as a ‘second type’ of need. Basic or course-of-life needs (Braybrooke, 1987) are of this sort. Among such needs are food, water, shelter, safety, medical care and clothing. These, we might say, are expressed biologically. In addition to these, certain course-of-life needs arise in a particular culture. In liberal democracies, for example, the need for freedom to make life-directing choices is generally recognized.

Questions have been—and continue to be—raised about how these needs should be met and by whom but, as we move beyond basic needs, we encounter further complications in the identification of needs. When we put together a curriculum, there is an assumption that it will somehow meet students’ needs. Often in our day-to-day work, we forget about the connection between curriculum and needs or suppose it has already been established in a long-standing body of goals and objectives. All we need to do, then, is to tinker around the edges, adding things here, subtracting there, and perhaps forcing a given curriculum on students who have not studied it in the past and may have no expressed need for it. Most of the needs we infer for students—if only half-consciously—are inferred pre-actively; that is, they are inferred and written into the curriculum before we meet particular students.

Other inferred needs may be identified interactively. Working with a particular high school student, we may decide that she needs to learn how to add fractions or that she needs to learn punctuality. These are still inferred needs—needs not expressed by the student—even though they are identified with reference to a particular student. When we turn to the discussion of conflicting needs, we’ll see that one possible response is to discard some inferred needs when they are challenged but, clearly, we should not always do this. Insisting on every inferred need we have established is authoritarian. Giving way whenever such a need is challenged marks us as permissive. Neither style is characteristic of the best teachers or parents (Baumrind, 1995).

Before considering how to act on needs, however, we should consider one more distinction. Human beings are ‘wanting’ creatures (Brecher, 1998). Our wants seem sometimes to be limitless. If we recommend responding as positively as possible to expressed needs, are we committed to meeting every ‘want’ that is expressed? Not every want rises to the level of a need. It may help to consider the following criteria for deciding when a want should be recognized (or treated) as a need:

1. The want is fairly stable over a considerable period of time and/or it is intense.
2. The want is demonstrably connected to some desirable end or, at least, to one that is not harmful; further, the end is impossible or difficult to reach without the object wanted.
3. The want is in the power (within the means) of those addressed to grant it.
4. The person wanting is willing and able to contribute to the satisfaction of the want. (Noddings, 2003, p. 61)

The last criterion suggests a form of partnership in satisfying wants. The child who wants a new bike and whose want satisfies the first three criteria, might, for example, be willing to help pay for it by saving money from his allowance. Usually, the criteria are used for cases like this—a person's desire for some material thing that may or may not be considered a need. However, with slightly refined thinking, the last criterion can also be applied to a situation familiar to educators. For example, most students want good grades; at least, most children start school eager to learn and hoping to get good grades. The student who wants good grades must be willing to work for them. But notice that, in the matter of grades, we rarely ask what the student is willing to contribute. More often, we arbitrarily set the conditions for an A, B, or passing grade. Some children just cannot meet the conditions, especially if the grades are to be awarded competitively. In failing to negotiate the conditions to meet this student want, we miss many opportunities to convert vague wants into felt needs. Instead, the vague want becomes a hopeless longing and the student gives up.

A word of caution here. A student's willingness to contribute to the satisfaction of a want or need should not be turned into a bribe. Parents often corrupt the process by making fulfillment of a want contingent on good behavior that is irrelevant to the end sought. This can be a double mistake because it offers a reward for behavior that should be an unconditional expectation in healthy family life (Kohn, 1993), and it disconnects the want or need from the effort required to satisfy it. In schools, for example, students are sometimes assured the passing grade they want in return for attending class and causing no trouble. Instead, honest teachers might present a list of relevant learning tasks students could choose to complete in order to obtain, say, a B. This approach encourages students to think about why they want a B and how hard they are willing to work for it. It also ensures that, if they complete the tasks adequately, their want will be satisfied. The much-wanted B will not depend solely on competitive test grades, or perhaps not on tests at all. Such assurance can be vitally important for youngsters who have had little success in their lives (Nichols & Thorkildsen, 1995; Michie, 1999). The testimony of many adults tells us that the failure to achieve badly wanted success in school can lead to lifelong fear of learning and of the authorities who try to teach (Shipler, 2004).

In addition to differentiating wants from needs and pre-active from interactive inferred needs, more should be said about expressed needs. Sometimes such needs are actually, verbally expressed. But many times, internal needs remain hidden—sometimes even from the one who has them. How are these different, then, from inferred needs? Educators certainly need to hypothesize and make inferences in trying to get at them. But when they are uncovered, they clearly belong to the one

struggling to express them. Children may cover over the need to belong with a show of indifference, their need to be relieved of fear by avoiding any task that might induce the fear of failure, their need to succeed in school by pretending that success is unimportant to them. These hidden needs are expressed in ways that require skillful and sensitive interpretation.

### **Overwhelming needs**

Many children today come to school (if they come at all) with overwhelming needs (Kozol, 1988, 1991; Quint, 1994; Anyon, 1997; Books, 1998). As if to confirm the point made above about children covering over their real needs, one 11-year-old said:

Sometimes at school I just avoid teachers because they might feel sorry for me because they might see like bruises or something. ... Sometimes I act bad so they won't feel sorry for me, then if they see a bruise or something they would think I deserved it. I would rather have them think that than getting the principal or nurse. (Quoted in Weis & Marusza, 1998, p. 38)

It is hard to imagine this youngster feeling a need to learn arithmetic when her basic needs for love and safety have not been met. She has not even had an opportunity to learn that decent, emotionally stable adults would never suppose that she deserved the beatings she has suffered. All of her energy is going into enduring, worrying, covering up and inviting new emotional wounds through the means she has chosen to cover up the physical ones. I am not arguing here for a rigid hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1954). Often, basic needs and needs associated with self-actualization co-exist, and some deeply troubled children relieve their anxieties by immersing themselves in schoolwork. But more often, needy children simply cannot concentrate well enough to learn.

All kinds of real, pressing needs overwhelm the academic ones we so easily infer for schoolchildren. Homelessness, poverty, toothaches, faulty vision, violence, fear of rebuke or mockery, sick or missing parents, and feelings of worthlessness all get in the way of the learning deemed important by school people.

Then there is the foolishness actually taught in many classrooms, material presented without regard for either educational aims or students' expressed needs. David Shipler describes a sixth grade English lesson he observed. Students were given two sentences and asked to identify the complete subject and the simple subject in each. Here are the sentences:

1. Have you heard the new CD by Gloria Estefan?
2. Those reporters have been interviewing the mayor all day.

To the first, one child answered, 'CD'. 'No,' said the teacher, 'Who are they talking to?' Student: 'You'. Teacher: 'Right'.

On the second, we hear the following interaction.

Student: Those reporters.

Teacher: Right. Damion, can you tell us what the simple subject is?

Damion: Mayor.

Teacher: No. Stan?

Stan: Reporters.

Teacher: Because reporters is what we're focusing on. (Shipler, 2004, p. 243)

Shipler assesses the teacher's explanations as 'terrible'. Terrible explanations, yes, but why did school people infer that children in a poor school (or any school) needed to learn this material? What need is met by teaching this topic? I'll come back to this in a discussion of negotiating and balancing needs.

Not only are some children overwhelmed by needs they bring with them from home, but teachers too often make things worse (Anyon, 1997). Shipler writes:

In every school, students could point to at least one or two teachers who stood out because they answered questions and showed the kids respect. More often, though, children felt deterred from asking. 'They give you a smart remark or a disrespectful answer,' said an eighth grade boy in Akron. His classmates added that they were made to feel stupid by teachers' tone of voice and body language. (2004, p. 247)

The teachers to whom this boy referred ignored the felt need of students to ask questions and to receive a respectful response. But there are also teachers who do wonderful things with children whose expressed needs are both great and different from the needs inferred by curriculum makers (Charney, 1992; Meier, 1995; Deiro, 1996; Nieto, 1999; Bullough, 2001). The stories are many and heartening but, despite similarities, they are also quite different. Some sensitive teachers manage to teach the standard curriculum to students whom others would find impossible to teach. Some abandon the standard curriculum to teach lessons about life and relationships. Some act effectively as social workers. Some act almost as parents.

Qualitative researchers have given us vivid pictures of both wonderful and terrible teaching. However, we do not know enough about how teachers negotiate and balance needs. We know that it happens, but we know little about the decision mechanisms used by teachers, how alternative curricula are developed and justified, or how teachers persevere under the pressures of standardized testing. When teachers succeed in teaching the standard curriculum, we often are ignorant of the special conditions—such as mandatory involvement of parents—that made the success possible. Sometimes in such cases, a packaged curriculum is credited for the success only to be discredited a year or two later.

The standardization movement also raises deeper questions. If standard test scores rise, what real gain has been made? Some years ago in the US, high schools in many states instituted competency tests for graduation but, although teachers worked hard and with considerable success to get students through the tests, scores on the big national tests were unaffected. Moreover, there was some evidence that material learned for the competency tests was quickly forgotten. Might gains on the new tests produce similar results? Do we risk producing a generation of young adults whose attitude toward learning and work will be 'just tell me what to do'? We do not know the answers to these questions, but many of us fear that sacrificing expressed needs to inferred needs may indeed have a depressing effect on intrinsic motivation, creativity, initiative, and the desire for continued learning. Michael Fielding (2004)

and Alfie Kohn (2004)—among many others—share my concern. In commenting on what is wrong with schools today, Kohn writes:

... the way conformity is valued over curiosity and enforced with rewards and punishments, the way children are compelled to compete against one another, the way curriculum so often privileges skills over meaning, the way students are prevented from designing their own learning ... (2004, p. 570)

All of these comments relate directly to either the neglect of expressed needs or their distortion through the faulty methods instituted by policymakers. The original (sometimes intellectually valuable) expressed needs of students are converted into a mere, but keenly felt, need to pass tests.

### **Attending to needs**

Overwhelming needs cannot be met by the usual processes of schooling. Children who are in pain, afraid, sick, or lost in worry cannot be expected to be interested in arithmetic or grammar. Many of us now believe that schools—particularly those in poor neighborhoods—should be full-service institutions. Medical and dental care, social services, childcare and parenting advice should be available on campus. People who are poor, perhaps homeless, without dependable transportation cannot afford to run all over town seeking such services, and often they don't know where to begin (Noddings, 2002).

Citing interviews with clinicians in Massachusetts, Shipler notes, 'Eating and learning, housing and health, a mother's early nurturing and a child's later brain function are connected' (2004, p. 219). Academic and social problems are interconnected (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), and we can't solve one without attending to others. 'That's why,' Shipler observes, 'Dr Barry Zuckerman hired attorneys to work with his staff at the Boston Medical Center's pediatrics department' (2004, p. 225). Lawyers and social workers can help families to get better housing, and better housing can prevent or relieve asthma, earaches, lead poisoning and accidents.

Arguing along the same lines, Richard Rothstein (2002) suggests that attending to biological and social needs might return high dividends. Attending to dental needs, for example, should increase the possibility that children, no longer in pain, will be able to concentrate on schoolwork. 'In addition to health benefits, we might get a bigger bounce from such spending than from educational programs costing far more' (Rothstein, 2002, p. 20).

As things are today, schools are too often blamed for failing to work miracles. Like guilt-ridden flagellants, we urge ourselves on with slogans such as 'No excuses!', 'All children can learn!', 'High expectations!', and the like. After spending huge amounts on various programs of whole school reform, we are dismayed to find that academic achievement all too often is stagnant. And so it may remain unless we begin to think in an integrated fashion.

Instead of preparing teachers to educate the homeless, we should insist that no family be homeless. Instead of deploring the parenting skills of many adults, we should teach parenting in our schools. Instead of forcing academic algebra and



geometry on all students, we should teach them how to avoid exploitation by check-cashing outfits that charge usurious rates (Shipler, 2004). As citizens, we should press for the day when no person who works full time at an honest job lives in poverty. And as educators, we should be ashamed to advertise education as *the* way out of poverty when, of course, the jobs that now pay poverty wages will still have to be done by someone. Education can be the way up for only some. A decent society should be concerned about all of its citizens.

Barbara Ehrenreich, living temporarily as a poor person and reporting on the experience, comments on the plight of poor people needing everything at once:

I need a job and an apartment, but to get a job I need an address and a phone number and to get an apartment it helps to have evidence of stable employment. The only plan I can come up with is to do everything at once ... (2001, p. 54)

Add to the problems of obtaining job, apartment and phone those of childcare, transportation, and suitable dress, and the needs really are overwhelming.

Rothstein (2002) urges us to increase experimental research in education to learn more about the effects of the total environment on children's achievement. In particular, cost-benefit analyses should be conducted to see whether non-educational interventions might be more effective than directly educational strategies. Qualitative research can both inspire such experiments and elaborate on their findings. Such research certainly can and should make the plight of the poor vivid and moving. At bottom, however, we know that, even if achievement scores are not thereby improved, a caring society should still be sure that everyone has decent housing, adequate childcare, medical insurance, and a living wage. We don't provide these things so that achievement scores will go up. We provide them because people need them, and caring people respond to the need.

### **Negotiating needs**

If basic biological and social needs were met, it would be appropriate to give most of our attention to the educational problems over which educators have more direct control. Among these problems, balancing expressed and inferred needs is of central importance. Today we give little attention to this problem. The curriculum may undergo changes—usually to align it to standardized tests—but we rarely question whether the curriculum is persuasively connected to our larger aims and to the expressed needs of students.

'Why do we gotta study this stuff?' is a question that deserves an answer. It is a clear sign that the need we have inferred for students is not one that they are expressing or feeling. What need is expressed here? Almost certainly, it is a need for meaning. Students need to know how schooling is related to real life, how today's learning objective fits into their own interests and plans, and even whether there is any meaning to life itself. These questions—spoken or merely implied in the initial challenge—should induce deep and lively discussion. Addressing them is not a distraction or waste of time. On the contrary, such discussions are at the heart of what it means to educate. Caring teachers can help students to understand the

process of socialization they are undergoing, the consequences of choices suggested by their expressed needs, and the sources to which they might turn for further knowledge. In addition to engaging in genuine education through these discussions, teachers who encourage them reap another reward—the ordinary lessons go better. Students will work on even trivial material for teachers they like and trust. Such teachers admit to their students that some subject matter is trivial and that, in a sense, we are all caught in a curriculum that offers both meaning and nonsense. The teacher's message is that we'll get through the nonsense together and work eagerly toward the construction of personal and collective meaning.

Too often, conscientious teachers have tried to come up with convincing answers that connect the lesson's objective to a practical problem, and sometimes this satisfies the student's question. But much that we teach does not have this kind of direct relevance, and some of it is simply a waste of intelligent effort. In such cases, the teacher's best answer might be, 'The powers that be say you and I have to do this'. Having to give this answer frequently should be a reason to engage in serious aims-talk. What does it mean to educate? What are the aims of education? What does the present task—the one challenged by our students—have to do with educating?

These are important educational questions, and we should spend time addressing them. The teacher who did the dreadful lesson on simple and complete subjects could not have asked herself these questions. This is not to say that they cannot be answered with respect to the topic. Although *I* can't think of a convincing answer and would drop the topic, reasonable people differ, and some might argue that it is significantly connected to a large aim of education. But if they could construct such an argument for the topic, they would surely suggest a better way of teaching it. Aims-talk is ultimately practical.

Researchers might try to find out how often teachers connect the day's learning objective to the aims of education and/or to the expressed needs of students. If, for example, teachers infer the need for students to learn standard English—as, say, a requirement for successful economic life in a liberal democracy—how do they go about meeting the need? Where, if at all, does identifying simple and complete subjects fit? What does such learning contribute to the aim of learning standard English? Why is it that instruction in grammar so often has little effect? And why do so many accomplished writers feel that much instruction in grammar is a waste of time? What might we do instead?

When inferred needs are challenged, the best response is to think through the whole problem carefully. What expressed need lies beneath the challenge? If the present task (supposedly designed to fill a need) is poorly connected to the major aims of education, it should be discarded. Perhaps we can substitute one that is clearly connected to both our aims and the expressed needs of our students. One can imagine, for example, a lesson in which the teacher starts by asking the students, 'Why would it be wrong to say, "Has you heard the new CD by Gloria Estefan?"' In some communities, the answer might be that there is nothing wrong with that way of asking the question, and this could lead to a lively discussion of language

communities and where it is appropriate or inappropriate to use various forms. A lesson of this sort might involve history, politics, sociology, and psychology as well as language, but it would be guided by both a defensible educational aim and the expressed needs of students. A caring teacher, listening to students as they express the need to have their language respected, can show the needed respect and, at the same time, offer cogent reasons for students to learn standard forms. Certainly, if Shippler's teacher held competence in standard English as an aim, the lesson she conducted failed miserably. What was she trying to do?

Teachers and parents should be open to abandoning some inferred needs. Indeed, when we begin to think this way, much of the current curriculum seems trivial—a collection of unconnected fragments. In parenting, a lovely example of rethinking inferred needs can be found at the very end of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*. Babbitt had always wanted his son to get a college degree; indeed, he and all the rest of the family had inferred that Ted *needed* that degree. But the boy confessed his desire to become a mechanic: 'I think I'd get to be a good inventor,' he said (Lewis, 1922, p. 401). And Babbitt listens. Then he gives his enthusiastic consent, admitting:

I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life! ... Go ahead ... The world is yours! (1922, p. 401)

Babbitt's comment on his own life is chilling. Joseph Campbell commented on it in one of his interviews with Bill Moyers. Imagine living such a life! Campbell's advice to the young: Follow your bliss! Can teachers help young people to do this and still get the education they 'need'? When we insist unreflectively on inferred needs and neglect expressed needs, we are likely to have unhappy, confused and resistant students.

But sometimes we contribute to unhappiness and cynicism by accepting expressed needs that seem to facilitate our work as teachers. For example, students who work hard for high grades please us. We know that some youngsters who are successful in achieving high grades and test scores are unhappy, and many have lost interest entirely in learning (Pope, 2001). Here our task may be to restore an inferred need—the need to engage in learning for its own sake—and de-emphasize the expressed need for high grades. After all, the need we educators infer—a real, vital engagement with learning—started out as an expressed need in our early childhood students. As schooling proceeds, too many students cease to express that need and substitute one that educators reward—the need to work hard for good grades. No wonder so many students are stressed and unhappy today. Researchers should give more attention to identifying and documenting the causes of increased depression and stress among the young. How widespread is this phenomenon? And what role do schools play in aggravating it?

Dewey once wrote: 'To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness' (1916, p. 308). Do students hear that message today? My guess is that students are told repeatedly that the key to success (and, thereby, happiness) is to do well in school, go to college, and get a high-paying job. How often do they hear the story told over and over in biographies that the happiest, most successful people are almost always those who are doing what they

really love? And some of these happy, successful people were not all that good at 'doing school'.

Today, in the name of equity, we force all children—regardless of interest or aptitude—into academic courses and then fight an uphill battle to motivate them to do things they do not want to do. Have we decided that it is impossible to create vital and relevant curricula around interests other than the academic? Are there no success stories that begin in vocational or highly specialized education? Because academic courses are often the only choice, many students drop out entirely. With excellent vocational training—chosen, not coerced—many more young people might be prepared for gainful employment that they would actually enjoy. In the past, children—too often children of color—were assigned to tracks considered lower than the revered academic. But if these tracks offered rich curricula and highly skilled teachers and if they could be freely chosen by any interested student, the stigma of the past could be lifted. Forcing everyone into one narrow and increasingly watered-down curriculum is hardly equitable.

A basic need for everyone—especially for people living in post-industrial liberal democracies—is to satisfy at least some personal interests. Our interests instigate and help us to form purposes. In discussing purposes, Dewey wrote:

There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis on the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process ... (1938, p. 67)

That all legitimate interests and talents should be nurtured seems indisputable, but educators should not discard every inferred need that is challenged. Sometimes, after thinking things through critically, we may stand by the initial need. Preceding his remark on the importance of the learner's participation in the formation of purposes, Dewey said:

Plato once defined a slave as the person who executes the purposes of another, and ... a person is also a slave who is enslaved to his own blind desires. (1938, p. 67)

Teachers and parents *do* sometimes know what is best. In the face of challenge, boredom, or overt antagonism, teachers must find a way to move toward the satisfaction of needs not yet expressed by students. To develop this theme fully would take a volume—perhaps several volumes. Suffice it to say here that the resolution requires critical thinking and dialogue directed to mutual understanding of both expressed and inferred needs. In this dialogue, caring teachers show that they are willing to rethink inferred needs, and students should be encouraged to criticize and re-evaluate their own interests, wants, and purposes. It is acceptable and understandable, for example, to want high marks, and good teachers are committed to helping in this quest. But what aims motivate this desire? What does the student want to learn, create, do, or be? It should not be enough simply to want high grades.

The need for this dialogue suggests that not every class session should be directed or dominated by a specific learning objective. Many significant class periods should be given to the development of care and trust, the search for connections among

interests and aims, the identification of learning objectives (that may vary from student to student), and free gifts of intellectual material that students may pick up and use to satisfy their own needs. How often is this happening?

I have suggested here that educational researchers give more attention to the expressed needs of students, to how teachers try to balance expressed and inferred needs, and to how unsatisfied needs work against success in school. We are not going to overcome poverty and misery by a bootstrap operation in schools. We need to remind ourselves that conditions in the larger society need much improvement and also that the aims of education include far more than getting high grades and test scores. Continual reflection on aims should help us in the task of balancing expressed and inferred needs.

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