

# What Really are the Basics?

*Rather than to continue the "redipping" process to teach the fundamentals, the presenter will attempt to show and discuss other strategies that have worked with children in levels 3-12.*

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If we are to look upon education as building whole people so that they can function in a democratic society, we must re-examine what is fundamental. I suppose if we were to ask almost anyone what the fundamentals are, he would cite the three R's meaning reading, writing and ciphering. This is in keeping with the notion that the school is the place for book learning, that the rest of the organism does not and should not grow in school but should do it somewhere else.

With a scientific approach to education we obviously need a new definition of what is fundamental. It seems to me that *anything is fundamental without which the organism cannot thrive*. I do not say "cannot live", because organisms of all sorts are extremely tenacious of life. Just being alive means very little when compared to becoming a thriving, adequate human being. In fact, there are people who have never developed any psychological selves, others who through brain damage have lost what they had but who live on in a physical sense.

With this definition we can see that the so-called three R's are not fundamental. This has to be granted because we know so many people who have thrived without one or all of them. There are many fine human beings in the world who do not have them. For example, a large percentage of our population, including many college graduates, have almost no skill in mathematics. These people are considered successful because they have lived well. They often have raised fine families, met economic obligations, extended love to many people.

The three R's are skills which facilitate living in our present society. They are, of course, desirable, and we should teach them as much and as well as we can, but they are not necessarily essential to the good life, and we should not teach them so insistently and so aggressively that we diminish the individual's ability to grow toward humanness.

#### WHAT ARE THE FUNDAMENTALS?

Following is a list of six things which seem to be essential if the human organism is to thrive. Undoubtedly, the list could be extended. Since some of these must and do come at the same time, it is difficult to establish a proper order for them. Some have to be provided in early infancy, but all are continuously essential through life and, therefore, must be provided by the school for that time when the school is a prominent part of life.

1. The first fundamental is *other people*. The infant is born with the equipment for becoming human. Nature provides that no human being shall be deprived of at least one other person. The human infant is born completely helpless and has to be cared for by another human being, usually his mother, if he is to survive. His undeveloped cortex can be built in no other way. This is the meaning of the long infancy in the human species. The lower animals are, at least in most cases, not so dependent on their mothers. They do not need this cortical development because they have little or no cortex and in many instances are able to fend for themselves immediately. The baby chick, for example, can start pecking for its food almost as soon as it is out of the shell. In fact, it comes equipped with the instinct to peck. The lower animals seem to come into life with a good many instincts so that they can survive without assistance. The human infant comes equipped with almost no instincts at all, seemingly to compel others to provide for it. Thus, nature provides another person for the beginning of life at least. This need is continuous throughout life, because the human potentiality for psychological growth is continuous.

2. In order to have other people, we need *good communication* between at least one adult and the very young. This seems self-evident, but the whole business of communication is more complicated than has ordinarily been supposed. The way in which the mother communicates with the babe and in which other adults do so is of greatest importance. Communication is not a one-way affair. Too often it has been believed that to just send messages constituted communication. For example, the radio and television experts call themselves communications people, but all they do is broadcast, and they may have no receivers at all. Teachers often labor under the delusion that to send, to lecture, to tell, is to communicate. There never is any communication until what is sent has been received, and the condition of the receiver is more important than what is sent.



All of us, beginning at birth and throughout life, look out upon our surroundings to see whether those about us seem likely to help or threaten us. When the human environment looks facilitating, we tend to open up and to be receptive, that is, more accessible to communications. If the human environment seems threatening, we tend to withdraw, to build barriers for our protection. We become less receptive, less accessible. Sometimes in early infancy the avenues of communication become entirely closed, and such children are then called autistic. These children, due to their view of their world, have cut off all communication, and they become mere physical organisms. This is what can happen under extremely adverse circumstances. There are all degrees of communication, from the autistic to the open self. The establishment of facilitating communication is certainly one of the fundamentals without which no organism can thrive.

3. In order to establish communication, to have other people, the human being must have other people in a *loving relationship*. If he is to develop into a person who can maintain human relationship, he must be a loving person. By some strange device, nature has arranged for mother love which often "passeth all understanding". Of course, this does not always apply, because the mother sometimes has been damaged psychologically and may be so neurotic as to reject her own offspring. Ordinarily, however, this is not the case, and in normal instances love is automatically provided at the start of life.

If for some reason the infant is denied love in the beginning, he builds not love but hostility. This leads to isolation and deprivation of the stuff out of which adequate humans are built. This stuff, of course, is other people, and those who are driven into isolation are deprived of that which they must have if they are to be really human.

Some may be bothered by the use of the word "love" in this regard. Perhaps this is because the word has been used in a romantic sense for so long. This is only one of many meanings given in dictionaries. It is the only word strong enough to express the acceptance needed between two human beings, or among all, for the proper development of human personality. This is the meaning of the admonition "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself [Matthew 22:39]."

Christ was not the only religious leader who advocated love among humans as essential to the good life. This has been done by religious leaders, poets and seers for centuries. Christ's words came many centuries before it was known that man even had a cortex, much less how it had to be developed. It is curious how scientific study has repeatedly verified (or found base for) these great teachings. It is curious, too, how some people can attend churches and synagogues on the sabbath to hear about the importance of love in human relationships and then contend that love is not needed by youth, that what they need is coercion, that those who do not yield to coercion should then be rejected.

4. A fourth fundamental is that each person must have a *workable concept of self*. The word "workable" is used here after some thought and searching. One needs to think well enough of himself so that he can operate. Perhaps none of us escapes the rigors of life without some damage to his concept of his own self. Abraham Maslow describes those who he thinks have not been damaged as "self-actualizing" but says he can name only a very few. Therefore, conceding that almost no one is going to develop unscathed in this regard, we still must have

people who think well enough of themselves so that they can face the vicissitudes of life. When a person does not think well of himself, he is crippled and cannot do anything. Nobody can do anything unless he thinks he can.

This may seem, at first, to support the show-off, the egotist. But such a person behaves in this way because he feels his inadequacy keenly and is trying to cover up by aggressive action. He comes as far from the mark of good human relations as do those who withdraw.

Workable concepts of self are built by the life good to live, in full love and acceptance of one's fellows. The unloved and unwanted become crippled and cannot thrive.

5. Every human being, in order to develop his full potential, must have *freedom*. This requirement is evidently built into the organism. The effort made by humans to achieve freedom is well known from studies of the history of man from the very beginning. While many people have lived and died in various forms of slavery, the masters have always had to be repressive and have lived in fear that the spirits of those they oppressed would break out in reprisal.

This great need is grossly misunderstood by many. It does not mean that anybody in these times has the right to do just as he pleases. The very fact of our living so closely together naturally limits this right. The right to do just as he pleases could only be achieved by a hermit. But one of the fundamentals is the need for other people. In order to have other people, the individual must behave in such a way that, while he has the choices of a free man, other people will not be repelled. This is freedom within the social scene. It is the product of cooperative living.

In order to live so that one can have the benefit of other people, one has to give up certain minor freedoms. Giving up minor freedoms enables one to achieve freedom on a higher level. For example, I am not permitted to leave the street in front of my house unpaved. At the same time, no one else may do this either. This way we do not have unpaved spaces in our streets. Having given up that freedom, I achieve the freedom of driving along streets without being stopped by mudholes which might exist if everyone were free to decide for himself.

There is enough freedom within the social scene - within cooperative living - to provide for the making of choices. We do not have to accept either autocracy or anarchy. While the need for freedom seems to be present in all humans, the capacity to exercise it within the social scene has to be learned. It can be learned in an atmosphere of love, democracy, cooperation.

6. Every person needs the chance to be *creative*. This does not mean that everyone should paint a picture or write a symphony. Creativity occurs whenever a person contrives a new way out of a unique dilemma. It is simply meeting the problems of living and inventing new ways to solve them. Most of us do this every day to a certain extent. Creativity is the growing edge of learning and living and is essential to any real life fulfillment. It can only take place in an atmosphere of freedom. In fact, freedom begets creativity; that is, when one is free, he will naturally contrive. When he contrives, he is fulfilled. When he is fulfilled, he may be said to thrive.



## CONCLUSION

Here, then, are the fundamentals, at least in part. There are probably others, but these are the ones which occur to me. If our young people have these, they will thrive.

To those who still cling to the three R's as fundamentals, I would say that the three R's are tools good to have, but that they alone never saved a boy from becoming delinquent. The most urgent needs of our youths go much deeper than the three R's. Indeed, the three R's cannot even be learned at all unless at least part of the above fundamentals are met. Some of these needs have to be met in infancy, and there is little the school can do about them except to rear a generation of people who will not reject their own young. But most of these needs are continuous throughout life and can be provided by the school.

We will never solve the problem of the three R's, which seems to vex so many people, until we learn to live with our young in such a way that they can be open to receive such matters.







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