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THE UTILIZATION OF WAKING HYPNOSIS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF READING AND COMPREHENSION SKILLS

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Some educators have two somewhat unsupported ideas concerning hypnosis. The first is that hypnosis is dangerous; the second is that this branch of psychology does not fall within their jurisdiction. The education profession engenders people who are intensely interested in everything and capable of mastering new knowledge. More harm with ignorance of hypnosis can be done than by the intelligent use of the forces of suggestion.

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to present this branch of psychology in education so that the educator can see the evidence, evaluate it, and determine whether this psychology is worthy of use to him.

Historial Evidence

Let us look into the history of hypnosis, which precedes our Bible, up to the present time, examine the writings of the men of the disciplines that have worked with hypnosis, and determine whether there is any danger in the state and, if not, modify that concept.

It was in 1775 that Mesmer (1) first published his theories and discoveries regarding "animal magnetism." Since that time the number of offerings in popular and scientific literature on hypnosis has reached thousands of books and articles. However, popular misconceptions remain prevalent, and hypnosis is considered awesome and mysterious, something of which the average person is curious, but fearful. Hypnosis, like medicine, sprang from magic. While medicine has lost its stigma and has become respectable, hypnosis is still regarded as akin to witchcraft.

It is a strange fact that in the thousands of years that hypnosis was used, by whatever name it may have been called, there was not one authenticated case history of any harm or danger caused by it, per se. A wise man once stated, "It is much easier to ignore the obvious than to renounce the traditional." Thus, thousands of persons all over the

world are hypnotized daily without harm, yet the method is considered dangerous simply because the Svengali-Trilby myth has been perpetuated.

Platonov (2), an associate of Pavlov, has used hypnosis for over 50 years in over 50,000 cases, and reports in one of the most remarkable books written on hypnosis: "We have never observed any harmful influence on the patient which could be ascribed to the method of hypnosuggestive therapy, presumably leading to the development of an 'unstable personality, slavish subordination, weakening of the will, increase of suggestibility, pathological urge for hypnosis, etc.' "

Grinker (3) long ago stated: "The so-called dangers from hypnotism are imaginary. Although I have hypnotized hundreds of times, I have never seen any ill effects from its use. Berheim, Liebault, Ford, Wetterstrand and a host of others who have practiced suggestive methods in thousands of instances have had similar experiences."

However, an infinitesimally small number of dangerous consequences following hypnotherapy have been reported. These isolated cases have been brought to the attention of the laity and of the profession by the one dissenting voice in the initial approval by the council on Mental Health of the AMA (4) that contends that hypnosis is a dangerous medical tool.

An evaluation of these cases reveals that it is not the hypnosis, which was involved, but many other variables. Personal bias, operator attitude, hearsay evidence, and the lack of documentation contribute to the claims that hypnosis is dangerous.

One dissenting voice, a psychiatrist dealing with emotionally disturbed patients, was unable to determine that the dangerous consequences of his psychotherapy were due to hypnosis. There has been no evidence of any harm or danger to any one of the thousands of students that have participated in experiments with hypnosis in the schools and universities throughout the world. The reports indicate that students have benefited emotionally and have improved their learning capacity.

Hypnosis, in one form or another, has long been an educational tool. Classroom teachers use hypnotic principles when they attempt to relax their students before starting a difficult assignment. Athletic coaches who motivate their teams by delivering pep talks are utilizing another form of hypnosis. Instructors who use audio-visual aids or dramatize a situation are employing additional hypnotic techniques. Because suggestion is a frequent concomitant of the teaching process, it is likely that many educators have unwittingly used some form of

hypnosis in many of their most successful pedagogical efforts. We hear no words of complaint or cries of danger in these hypnotic situations or when the identical state is achieved in the church or in religious contemplation.

Isn't it time that this nebulous ghost of the danger of hypnosis be exorcised and laid? The educator may then no longer use this as an excuse for failing to learn the scientific techniques of this branch of educational psychology for the mutual benefit of student and teacher.

Definition

At this point let us define and understand what the state of hypnosis is and is not.

Hypnosis is generally defined as a state of consciousness characterized by a heightened responsiveness to suggestion. (5)

Suggestion can be defined as the uncritical acceptance of an idea. It is the process by which sensory impressions are conveyed in a meaningful manner to evoke altered psychophysiological responses. One cannot necessarily equate suggestions with hypnosis. The acceptance of ideas by suggestion must be differentiated from logical persuasion. Persuasion and suggestion are not interchangeable terms. Hypnosis, then, is a state of consciousness in which the individual has bypassed his critical factor and is engaging in selective thinking. He may accept or reject any suggestions given to him in any form. Those suggestions which he feels are beneficial, he will accept, and those suggestions that he feels will be detrimental to him, he will reject. Unfortunately, much that has been written on the subject has been written by observers who have looked at the subject from the outside, rather than by people who have experienced the state.

Problems

At this time, let us examine some of the problems the educator and the student face in their daily endeavors to teach and to learn, diagnose the causal factors if possible, examine the literature of the research with hypnosis in these areas, and evaluate the results. We will then be able to determine in which areas hypnosis has been shown to be effective, which areas need further research and how this modality could be included as a valuable teaching aid the educator would be able to use for the benefit of his students and himself.

Let us consider the situations which most often provoke tension between teachers and pupils. "Disorder" in the halls, noise in the classrooms, "wisecracks" muttered to a companion, pushing or punching a

neighbor, inattention in the classroom and a thousand other similar trivialities which frequently bring the teacher and pupil into antagonism with each other. These disciplinary problems are faced by all teachers at some time. Adequate studies of the relation of disciplinary problems to the moods, emotional poise, health, and effectiveness of the teacher are not available.

Poor concentration, lack of attention, and other undesirable study habits often handicap students whose intelligence test scores indicate that they should be earning superior grades.

Lack of motivation is a factor. The difference between an excellent student and a poor one is often as much a matter of interest as of intelligence. Students need motivation to attain the desire for knowledge that can be derived from school.

A person is motivated to learn when he has the active attitude of desiring to learn. Everyone knows from common experience that the active desire to develop a given motor skill, to establish the easy recall of certain data, or to understand a given functional relationship, plays an important part in determining the speed and efficiency of the learning. Motivation influences directly the intensity of the effort that the student will put forth to learn. It determines the singlemindedness, the unity of attention, that he is able to give to the task. It mediates the amount of fatigue or discomfort he is willing to undergo in the process of learning. A student with high persistence and strong motivation generally does well with his work. Often, what he lacks in mental ability is compensated for by his purposefulness. On the other hand, some bright students do poorly in their work because they have little interest in the learning process and no strong motivation to succeed academically.

Lack of reading skills and lack of comprehension are important factors in a student's learning ability. No skill is more important to an individual from the first grade through his entire life than his ability to read correctly and understand what he reads. The student with bad reading habits is handicapped throughout his academic life.

Test anxiety is a common phenomenon which afflicts most students at some time. Many students who have studied the material and are well prepared when they enter the examination situation, become nervous and frightened, tense up, then are unable to recall the material studied, make minor errors, forget essential data and make poor scores on their tests.

The student with special disabilities such as speech defects, lameness, poor vision or hearing, mental or physical weakness are faced

with additional problems. The feeling of neglect, the loss of social status, and increased tension in their families make their adjustment to the learning situation doubly difficult. They are tormented daily by their sense of differentness or inferiority in the vast number of situations in which they are not able to fit easily or adequately.

Students and teachers face numerous problems in their efforts of teaching and learning. Hypnosis can be used to help alleviate some of the problems.

Technique for Solving the Problems

The technique is repeated suggestions like these: you are motivated by long range goals; each time you sit down to read or study, your mind will be so concentrated that you will be able to retain all the material you study; anything which may have bothered you in the past—distractions of any kind—will merely roll off you like water off a duck's back; each time you take an examination or test you will be able to recall the preceding suggestions. Prior to test time tell the student to take three deep breaths, close his eyes and tell himself that he will remember everything he has studied—it works. (6)

Higgins (7) cites a case at Parks College of a student who became so upset about pending examinations that he developed cramps in his stomach and legs and, on the day before exams, developed functional blindness. Higgins hypnotized him into believing that he would make an A or B on all his exams. The boy regained his sight within an hour and achieved an excellent record on all tests.

Higgins' technique is a simple one—he has the student sit in a relaxed state and focus his attention on some monotonous sound, such as a ticking of a clock. This puts the student into a light trance; then he suggests self-relaxation by a posthypnotic suggestion or signal. He suggests that when he wakes up he will be able to help himself overcome the fear and panic by some device such as taking a breath. If this does not get results, then he uses what he calls revivification. He takes the student back, via a deeper trance, to the time when the examination panic began. After he finds the source of the trouble, he plants a posthypnotic suggestion that when the student panics he is to recall that he is no longer the little second grader that flunked the spelling exam. It usually works.

Exam jitters is regarded as a serious problem. Higgins estimates 20 to 25 per cent of all high school and college students experience severe temporary emotional disturbance at exam time. The rate is higher in college, because so much more is at stake. Exam panic some-

times leads to suicide and breakdowns, as well as to failures. Hypnosis or auto-suggestion, as a means of therapy, has unlimited potential.

The emotions play a vital and important role in the life of a student. Prescott (8) writes, "If mild emotions are tonic, stimulating and contributory to a zest in life, such is not true of strong unpleasant emotions." Cannon (9) devotes an entire chapter to the "emotional derangement of bodily functions." He shows the physiological effects of strong emotions resulting in digestive disorders, heart diseases and circulatory difficulties and derangements of glandular functions.

Jacobsen (10), at the University of Chicago, has worked for some years on the problem of the cases of frequent and upsetting strong emotions which are found among students and the possibility of avoiding the continuance of strong emotions by extended practice in progressive relaxations. He writes: "Since conditions of nervousness, including highly emotional states, have been found to involve muscular contraction, it seemed quite logical to look in the direction of relaxation for a means to treat these nervous conditions."

Prescott (11) states, "It would be interesting to find out whether young children in preschool, kindergarten or elementary grades can be taught this technique of progressive relaxation. If it were possible they might be fortified to withstand better the later anxiety and turmoil which they will experience, and a training in the genuine control of the emotions would be feasible."

Kroger (12) states, "Most children go into hypnotic states readily." The techniques involved can be taught to everyone from the age of five on up. Krippner (13) states that 90 per cent of the college population can achieve the state so that it will be beneficial to them in various ways.

In this state, all the senses are more acute and there is a greater awareness of the total environment. The individual is always conscious of what is taking place and can recall everything that transpired while in the state. He may or may not have amnesia for the events depending on his own desires in this matter. The general picture of a hypnotized person is one with his eyes closed, his respiration slow, his limbs heavy and his movements lethargic. He may appear asleep; however, this is not the case. The EEG (14) readings of a person in the deep state of hypnosis are identical with the readings of a person fully awake and not those of the sleep state. There is another state of hypnosis in which the individual has his eyes open, his respiration normal, his movements rapid and accurate, his mind sharp, clear and alert. This state is called waking hypnosis. In this state the mind and body

can function at its best, and is the state the writer prefers in educational work. It is a state which everyone achieves at least twice a day, just prior to dropping off to sleep and a short time before awakening.

It is interesting to note, that in this age of enlightenment the tremendous advancement in communication, the arts and sciences, there appears to be considerable misconception of this subject.

Almost every person, upon opening his eyes after termination of the state will remark, "Was I really in hypnosis? I was conscious all the time; I knew everything that was going on; I have had this same feeling many times before." These statements are made in wonderment and almost disbelief, even though the subject has been told exactly what he would feel and experience in the state.

Some literature states that hypnosis can be utilized as a tool to improve the ability to learn. The student can benefit in an increased ease of memorizing, a heightened ability and motivation to learn. A heightened state of motivation, attention and concentration mobilized by post-hypnotic suggestion increases performance to different degrees and in varied areas.

C. L. Hull (15), one of the great leaders in the exploration of learning theory, was one of the pioneers whose outstanding work in the direction of bringing hypnosis out of the fields of clinical and abnormal psychology and subjecting it to more rigorous scientific experimentation. In his book, *Hypnosis and Suggestibility*, Hull demonstrates "a remarkable and detailed conformity of the phenomena of hypnosis to the known experimental characteristics of ordinary habituations." He summarizes the experimental evidence that "There is some striking experimental evidence which . . . tends strongly to confirm the clinical observations that hypnosis facilitates the recall of childhood and perhaps other remote memories." Various other tests found that recall, under hypnosis, was definitely superior to that of the normal state.

Scarf and Zamansky (16) used hypnosis to reduce the time required to identify a word exposed tachistoscopically. In this experiment, the word recognition thresholds of 24 college students were lowered, through hypnotic suggestion, by an average of ten per cent.

Two experimentors in this field measured the effects of hypnosis on the reading ability of ten college students. In the experiment, 20 five-letter words were flashed on a screen at low levels of illumination. Measurements were made of the candle power needed to recognize each word as it was flashed on and off. In the hypnotic state, the subjects scored the greatest recognition improvement of those words which had previously required the most illumination.

With 21 high school students, Eisele and Higgins (17) have reported favorable results with the use of hypnosis for calming examination anxiety, for improving study habits, and for increasing concentration. Ambrose (18) has successfully used hypnosis with children exhibiting learning difficulties.

Krippner (19) reports excellent results in his work with students in improving study habits, removing test anxiety and improving motivation and interest.

Salzberg (20) reports, "It was found that both hypnotic and post-hypnotic suggestion led to better performance whereas waking suggestion led to poorer performance." Hypnotic and post-hypnotic subjects tended to improve more as tasks became more complex "such as counting, abstraction and memory."

Fowler (21) found that more than a year and a half after his experiments with several classes of students, many of the subjects were coming into his office and informing him that they were able to concentrate deeper and longer, remember more, read faster, and generally continue to enjoy the benefits they believed were theirs as a result of his hypnotic suggestions and the remediation in reading. They were quite definite in their beliefs.

A series of experiments was conducted in which the subjects were tested twice in the waking state and twice in the hypnotic state on a great variety of performances in which speed of reading and comprehension were included. Students were given definite hypnotic suggestions of ease, confidence, motivation, and increased ability. Many of the differences proved significant! A 32 per cent increase in speed of tapping and 43 percent decrease in fatigue; a 20 percent increase in aimed dotting; 22 per cent time saved in cancellation of letter. Subjects made 5 times as many errors in waking state; subjects were more than twice as efficient in the post hypnotic state. A 30 per cent increase in the drawer finding test, and an increase of 23 per cent in digit span was evident. In memorization there was a 47 per cent improvement in meaningful symbols.

Hypnotic Benefits for Learning

Post hypnotic suggestions:

1. Can increase psychomotor speed and endurance and decrease physical fatigue.
2. Can increase both span of attention and duration of attention as well as routine clerical performance.
3. Can increase speed of learning.

4. Can increase speed of association, mental alertness, concentration and mental efficiency.
5. Can heighten accuracy of perception.
6. Can improve the application of abstract abilities.
7. Can improve reading comprehension.

The students in the hypnotic test groups showed and listed a variety of concomitant results:

1. The ability to think more clearly.
2. The ability to understand other people better.
3. The ability to accept disappointments more easily.
4. More frequent reading of curricular and extra-curricular materials.
5. More interest in attending all classes.
6. Increased ability to control temper.
7. Nervous tension was eased.
8. More peace of mind.
9. More attention to academic homework.

Most students can achieve this state and benefit by it. It is possible for them to achieve the state by the utilization of tape recordings or records which can produce the state and then give specific instructions for that purpose. We have made a series of tape recordings which teaches the student how to achieve the state by himself. There is a specific tape on achieving the concentrative state while studying or in the classroom, a tape for facilitating memory recall for the material studied, and finally a tape on the technique of taking tests. These tapes have been utilized for several years in the Clinic with students from the first grade through post-graduate level and have exhibited the results shown above. They have been used also in several schools with selected students who were having trouble in school or were failing. They have been able to improve not only the attitude of the students, but also their grades. The therapeutic effect of the relaxed state solves most of the student's problem without the need of special counseling or psychotherapy. When the subject is an emotionally disturbed child, then the use of hypnosis aids us in identifying the cause of the trouble and in alleviating it in a much shorter period of time.

Comprehension is essentially reading for meaning. Comprehension is basic in developing an appreciation of what is read. Comprehension is an indispensable means of getting pleasure from reading. Comprehension skills, rather than word perception skills, distinguish good readers from poor ones.

If the high school student is to get the maximum from his courses, it is no longer enough for him to be able to recognize words and under-

stand their literal meaning. Now he is asked to do specialized reading in science, mathematics, and social studies: he is introduced to some of the greatest works in our literary heritage; he must learn to grow through reading as well as in reading. To do this he needs help in the final step of growing in reading. It is not enough to hand him an anthology of good works and say to him, "Read." Most students need specific help in learning to interpret the significance of unexpressed ideas, to determine the author's purpose, to judge the motives of the characters and the validity of statements of opinion, to understand figurative language, and to recognize and challenge biased writing. They need help in learning to reflect upon what they have read. (22)

Summary

In summary, then, we are reminded of three basic principles:

1. Reading is a process of experiencing, thinking, and learning; growth in reading is a continuous process that begins long before the child enters school and extends throughout his active life; although children follow the same general pattern of development in reading, they advance at varying rates and encounter different types of difficulties.
2. The goal in the teaching of reading for learning and thinking is to make the child less and less dependent on the teacher and more and more self-sufficient. To achieve this goal the child must learn how to use the entire range of references: dictionaries, almanacs, encyclopedias, and supplementary books and materials.
3. The interests of young people are as varied as the young people themselves. They are the product of many interrelated factors—intelligence, general maturity, home background, geographical location, past experiences, cultural opportunities. These interests vary in kind, diversity, and intensity. Happily, they can be kindled, sustained, enriched, redirected, and heightened through skillful guidance.

Conclusion

Finally, hypnosis has been shown to be an effective aid in the educative process. By utilizing the waking state of hypnosis, we can achieve even greater results than in the sleeping state. Although it is not necessary for the teachers to take special courses in hypnosis to utilize it, such courses would be helpful. Teachers can achieve the results desired by the utilization of tapes or records in the classroom and the student can utilize these tapes or records in the privacy of his home.

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