

Promulgation of Optimism in Secondary Education

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Abstract

Hopeful and optimistic attitudes affect many aspects of a person's life. Moreover; they are traits which are possible to acquire. A school counselor can achieve this

purpose through various procedures; thank to his / her deep influence upon the adolescent. Indoctrination of optimism should therefore definitely take place, among the miscellaneous functions of a good counselor.

Key words: Psychological counselor; (Course) Teacher; Hope; Optimism; Optimist.

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Figure 1
Optimist *Versus* Pessimist Over a Milk-Bottle (Illustration by the Author)

Capped Student— Alas, the Milk Is Diminishing!
Blond Student— We've Still Got Plenty of Milk, Fine!

INTRODUCTION

As Myers (1994, p.109) puts it; when it comes to enumerating the aids a psychological counselor possibly provides to a teenager; one should specifically include reinforcing hopeful and optimistic attitudes.

Optimism is the conspicuous trait of a contented individual. He/she usually is an extrovert, who is at peace with oneself, is comfortable and displays a feeling of being master of the situation one is involved in. He is the one who expects success in new ventures. He is happier, more successful and even healthier than his pessimistic counterpart (paraphrased from Myers, 1994, p.109).

Despite evil acts and ugly occurrences in this world; examples of beauty and goodness are also present for those who can diagnose and witness them; in any case; for those who actually can generate beauty and goodness of some sort under the given circumstances.

1. INTRICATE RELATIONS AMONG OPTIMISM, HOPE, FEAR

Research confirms that optimism does bring success. Optimism is reflected in explaining events. An optimistic person explains bad results by external happenings and unlucky situations, not by internal grounds. He regards himself as effective and proficient.

Salinger and his team verified that among university students dealing with swimming the more successful ones are the ones regarding this occupation from an optimistic viewpoint. Pessimistic explanations of occurrences (my fault! Things won't go better! I am doomed!) renders diseases more probable. One can infer that beliefs act upon biological issues (paraphrased from Myers, 1994, pp.76-77).

White (1974, p.373) affirms that even if fear¹ may compel success, it attains this along with hope and as for the effect of fear on self-confidence; it is invariably negative.

White (1974, p.372) underlines the fact that *some people are in possession of so few sources to enjoy life that if it were not for the feelings of hope that they nourish, life would have been really miserable for them. An expectation of future accomplishments can promote feelings of security. Sometimes even life or death is determined by sheer expectations.*

¹ Regarding the relationship between hope and fear; years ago, in a mosque named after the Ottoman admiral Piale Pasha, a preacher once proclaimed the following piece of sermon:

—*O good Moslem lives in the midst of hope and fear. If you fear too much about the consequences of the after-world; in that case you are committing a sin, since you are doubting the omnipresent mercy of Allah. If you are all-hopeful; on the other hand; then you are being arrogant, which is extremely dangerous and means approaching a Satanic trait, God forbid! It is solely an appropriate balance between the feelings of hope and fear, which would lead to salvation.*

2. GOOD ROLE MODELS

Hope goes hand in hand with optimism and especially in difficult circumstances it is like a life-savor. I still remember vividly: When I was a small boy; my octogenarian maternal grand-father planted poplar saplings in his small field near a brook. He was regretting the lost years.

The saplings needed some care and I was helping out during vacations. Once I said that they will take nearly a decade to grow, in a discouraging attitude. Grandpa replied that they constitute his future-university-degree as a metaphor equivalent of my own hopes. At the time, poplar trees were being sold to safety-match plants at fairly good prices. Patience is like an essential ingredient of hope.

Once upon a time; in a leather-goods / saddlery shop in Istanbul I saw a splendid belt, which was covered in dust beyond the glass case. I teased the shopkeeper that no would-be client shall pay for it; now that it is already dust-covered. The shopkeeper, whom I inferred to be an *Istanbulesque* Jewish salesman by his accent, gave a wonderful response:

—I don't mind waiting, my young fellow. We are patient people!

Any words from the mouth of a figure of authority in difficult situations, are very precious for the minor-aged person. In my third year in high school, we were put in a dorm with four bunks. One day an earthquake occurred in the home-city of one student. He quickly departed to check on the well-being of his family.

Before his return, obituary news (heart attack) came about the father of still another student, who also rushed to his coastal home-city. The remaining two of us got dejected. The other student developed fears about a third and fourth disaster which would hit us soon, to complete the round, so to speak. The next morning, he expressed his bad premonitions to the housemaster; who, after a little bit of reflection said a fantastically encouraging statement, even if too short and simple:

—Well, boys, I would say that things can only get better!

Our high spirits got re-established as if by a sheer wonder.

3. BAD EXAMPLES TO AVOID

Some people tend to emphasize or even exaggerate the bad face or side or aspect of almost anything. They are the ones who radiate negative energy and spoil the life happiness of others. A hypochondriac person (sick of sickness) as depicted in a classical play by Moliere would be such an example. He would associate all symptoms of diseases with his own being and inflict fear to his close associates, accordingly.



Figure 2
Actually, the Entire Educative Ambiance Should Promote Moral Courage and Nourishment of Hopes (Illustration by the Author)

Male Student— In our school, we use the most expensive technology!

Female Student— In our school, we enjoy the organizational climate: We feel comfortable and free!

Years ago I visited a poem exhibition by a pessimistic poet and regretted it afterwards. Despite his master of the language and ingenuity, the man was obviously an incorrigible pessimist and a sickly mind. Even the title of the exhibition was morose, macabre: “Life, I like you little!”

A two-stanza poem of his is —the original version was in Turkish—in my memory:

*While the white prince on his white horse was being anticipated;
They discerned in the distance the black prince on a black donkey!*

And even a much more *excruciating couplet* was addressed by the morbid poet to his former high school love:

*Susan, once the honor female student of the science-class,
and my very first love;
I hear that your honorarium in the high class brothel
has augmented to so many piasters, on our day!*

Years ago I had once intended to participate in a contest for writing song words for the Eurovision candidacy. The pamphlet distributed by the official Turkish television bureau was stipulating the specifications. One of the

clauses was prohibiting morale-spoiling sentences. I had appreciated this prerequisite, at the time. Pessimism takes away the joy of life.

4. OPTIMISM CAN BE LEARNED

Optimism can be exercised and learned. “Control” is a key-word. He who thinks that he can control variables related to his immediate surroundings, can achieve an optimistic attitude more easily. In management and organization sciences, we encounter the concept of self-efficacy,² which derives from the idea of control.

Indeed, a rather common appraisal error on the part of the rater in evaluating the performance of the subordinate, is the Attribution Error: The rater assigns certain causes to the behavior —external factors like the

² A former student of mine once asked the difference between self-confidence and self-efficacy. I thanked him for his ingenuous question and explained: The former involves all aspects of one’s life (one’s opinion of his own health, good luck in romantic affairs, family life and friendship expectations etc.); the latter pertains to work-domain, alone. (The Author)

job's difficulty or internal factors like ability, effort—and his self-efficacy (a person's continuing belief in future success despite past failure) also comes into play. Raters with high self-efficacy are prone to positive internal attributions. In simpler words; the higher the opinion of your boss about controlling his own task-problems, the higher will be your assessment grade in your personal docket (Çaya, 2014).

Lalljee (1996, p.128) writes that Dweck et al. (1978) verified that children in schools tend to explain their performance in a manner similar to the explanations of their own teachers.

Attaining good gains in the line of optimistic mentalities can be accomplished in secondary schooling thanks to steady and purposeful efforts of teachers and above all, counsellors, in this respect.

As Lemkau (1955) puts it, the effects of teachers upon adolescents are immense. The teen-ager is in conflict with the parents at home, in quest of his freedom. A substitute for the parents is necessary. Moreover; in the teen-ager mind, the capacity of idealized liking potential is great.

The teacher should be motivated to care for the student and to tackle his/her problems sincerely. Each human being is a treasure by himself, waiting to be discovered and explored. Many students are in possession of good traits not apparent at first sight. Creativity is one such asset, which does not necessarily involve a high level of IQ, either.

Professor Samurçay (1996) mentioned that once an introvert student of hers was brought to her attention to receive some psychological aid. At a moment, she asked the student what inanimate object he would like to become in his fantasy. The boy gave replies one after another: To become a big piece of diamond underneath the soil. To be discovered and cut by the hand of a master jeweller and become a necklace. To be admired on the windowpane by people. To ornate the neck of a nice young girl. To meet other necklaces in parties and listen to their stories! After being probed and encouraged for a time, the mentioned boy finally made it to a live radio program! Such strong became his moral courage!

Optimism is contagious and it needs to be supported, being brittle. Years ago; a harsh battalion commander in a military unit, gave orders that the officers were under

penalty. They were forbidden to go home in the evening and would stay in the barracks until a new notice. All of the dozen officers were dejected except a certain lieutenant. The young officer was joking about turning a movie titled *The Prison Birds*. He was drinking the tea cooked by the orderly and telling anecdotes and raising the spirits of the others. Before half an hour elapsed, the battalion commander; who probably saw that he couldn't hurt anybody, anyway; took back the penalty-decision.

CONCLUSION

Optimism, hopefulness, exuberance, positive-energy emission and similar behavior patterns are desired, while the diametrically opposite behaviors representing dejection and low spirits are condemned. To attain the former virtues and to shun the latter traits is a process getting enforced especially in teenager years. Teachers and above all counsellors should see that they should contribute to the formations of young minds and souls, accordingly. Nevertheless; a sort of realism far from illusions should also be kept in mind; since otherwise a backfire of empty illusions may come into the play. Utopias are not needed, either. One can be content with the little things³ in life.

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³ When I was a freshman, one day, I bought a nice, extra-hard-for-smokers toothbrush. I said to my roommate in the dormitory:

— I am looking forward to the moment when I shall be brushing my teeth in the morning.

He replied:

— My Dear Friend, when one talks about the little things in life, one does not expect them to be *that* little!

But the next morning he furtively watched be in the lavatories and a few days later I witnessed the presence of a similar toothbrush in his ajar-locker. I got delighted for being emulated! (The Author)