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ABSTRACT

The paper identifies and defines necessary components for the induction of energy into the adult teaching-learning experience, presents a heuristic device which describes the likely positioning of components and the roles of teacher and adult learner as provider and receiver of influence toward energy, and proposes a quasi-stationary formula which operationalizes the theory for data collection and analysis purposes. The 13 components or concepts cited as inducers of energy are: legitimacy of ignorance, commitment to the best, valuing the person, respect for competency in role, expectation of vital experience, uncertainty of outcome, optimism about outcome, sense of direction, dilemma, disclosure, feedback, risk, and reward from experiencing the experience. Each concept is carefully examined in regard to the difficulties of operationalizing it within real world settings and measuring the extent of its existence and change. Suggestions are provided for universal operationalization and for instrumentation to measure each concept, as well as for research directions for confirming, disconfirming or modifying the theory. Implications are drawn for teaching behavior and practice which would be consistent with the theory. A 20-item reference list contains nine items (obtained through an ERIC search) which are relevant to concepts in the theory. (Author/MS)

A Theory for Energizing Adult Students in the Classroom; with Implications for Instruction and for Testing the Theory

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents several of our ideas regarding the introduction of energy into the adult classroom learning experience. Energy, here, is defined as a sense of vitality, arousal, and activeness, and energizing is the process by which this sense is induced.

We are aware of evidence which indicates that arousal, activity and participation influence persons toward such "good" consequences as increased learning, high levels of psychological and physical well-being, fulfilling interpersonal relationships, and high work productivity (3, 8, 9, 19). The existence of these findings would surely seem to justify the relegation of focused attention on such questions as: What factors must be present in order to create the energizing experience? What must be done in order to facilitate the induction of these factors? What are the external behaviors and the internal responses of a member when he is in the midst of an energizing experience?

Even without the foregoing rationale for exploring the nature of energy induction, the ever-occurring question of leaders of groups and teachers of classes -- "How can I get persons to participate more?"--is, forus, a sufficient source of puzzlement to capture our theoretical, research, and practical interests. Since much of our own effort is directed toward the teaching of adults, we wish to focus our discussion on the induction of energy into the adult classroom.

Theory

Our own experience as providers and consumers of energizing moments in the classroom and our acquaintance with relevant social psychological literature strongly advises us that there is an array of interdependent factors, conditions, or characteristics which, as they are experienced, determine the extent of energy or vitality that arises within the class member. Further, we make the seemingly absurd assumption that this is true regardless of the subject matter being studied and the particular class members involved. Thus, we view these conditions as universally essential to the energizing of any member in any adult classroom. The member extracts some of these conditions from (1) the socio-emotional environment within the classroom. Others, the member extracts from (2) his engagement in learning tasks. Figure 1. portrays the energizing experience as being comprised of ten conditions of environment and four conditions of the learning task, and identifies the positions and general nature of instructor behavioral input and student output.

1. Socio-emotional environment

What follows now is an attempt to describe each of the conditions of environment. These conditions can be divided into two subsets. One subset is concerned primarily with (a) the class member's prehension of the activity in which he will be partici pating. The second subset is composed of elements related to (b) the member's perceptions of the interpersonal relationships associated with the activity.

a. Prehension of the activity

As we indicated above, one major category of variables is concerned primarily with the activity itself. Four elements are included in this category: The expectations of the class member, uncertainty of the outcome, optimism about the outcome and a sense of direction.

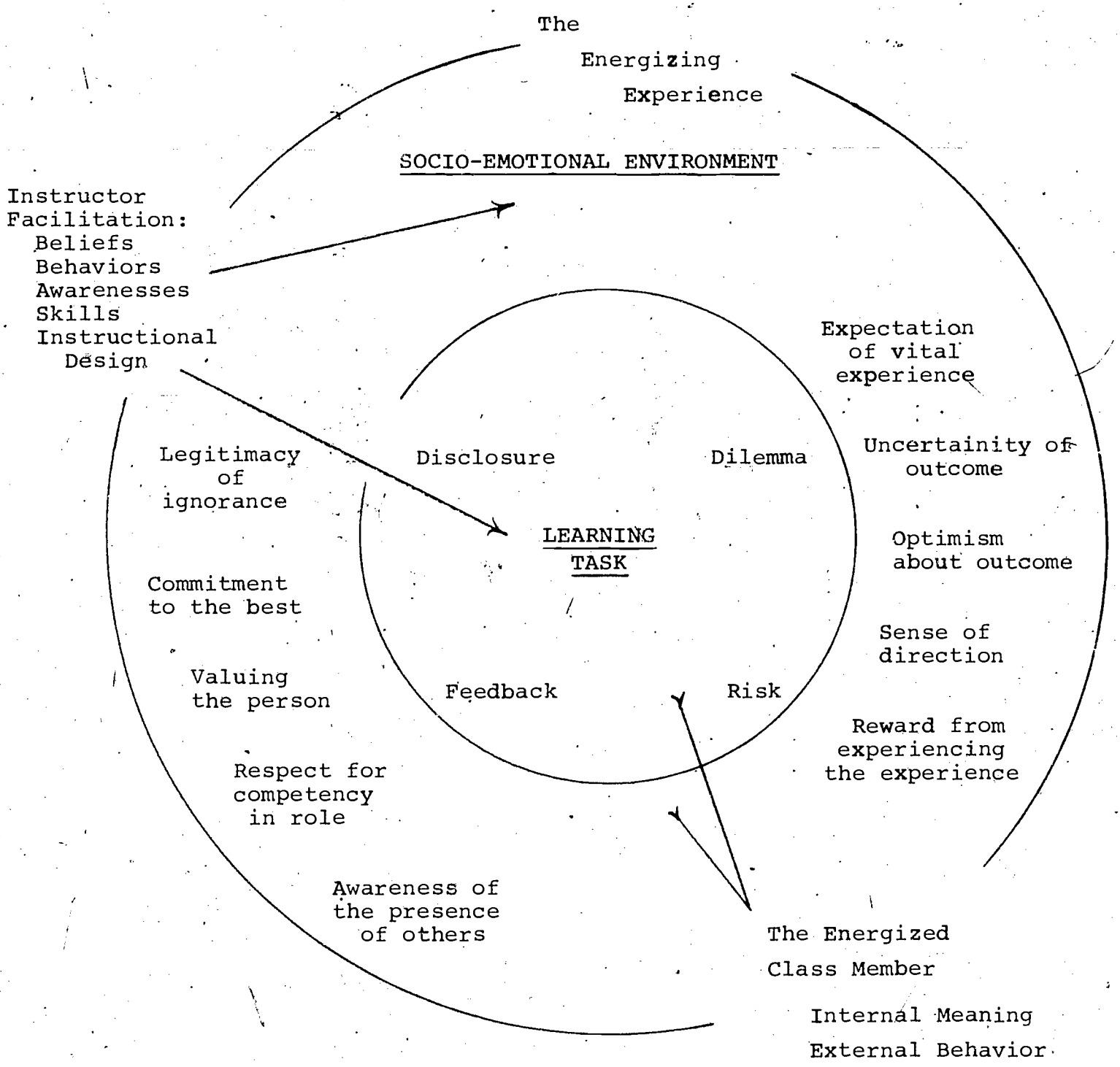


FIG. 1. Schematic representation of components of the energizing classroom experience

Expectation of vital experience. An important element of any energizing experience is the expectation that the activity will be relevant and important to the participant -- that is, the participant is perceiving the situation as crucial to his intellectual or affective development. In this sense, the activity is perceived as having face validity. Thus, there is an expectation or a set on the part of the class members that both the process and the resultant outcomes of the activity are near-indispensable toward the meeting of their needs. One class member recently brought this phenomenon into bold relief by saying, "At this moment I have a trembling awareness that I'm about to disconfirm a belief which I've always held to be true."

Uncertainty of outcome. A second element of this subset is concerned with the perceived uncertainty of the outcome. The class member is unsure of what the outcome of the situation will be and cannot anticipate or predict the end result. It will come as a surprise or discovery.

This element, as well as the expectation of vital experience, was illustrated recently when one of us designed a class session to demonstrate the use of the leaderless group discussion procedure as a means for selecting supervisory personnel. Five class members volunteered to participate in the leaderless discussion, while the remainder took the roles of assessors of supervisory traits of the discussion participants. Although the participants had a discussion topic and the assessors were provided general dimensions for observation, no one knew precisely what would occur or what the outcomes would be. At the conclusion of the session, both the leaderless discussion participants and the trait assessors spontaneously expressed the feeling that they were "sitting on the edge of their chairs caught up in the experience, and not knowing what was going to happen next."

Optimism about the outcome. Although the class member is uncertain as to outcome, he does feel the end result will be positive and valuable to him. In a broad sense, he feels that the net result will be of relevance to him and will meet his general expectations. Although anxiety and uncertainty may be evoked

because of the activity and the possible outcomes which could occur, the member believes that the outcome will be valuable to him. The member does not perceive the consequences of the activity nor the setting in which the consequences will occur in malevolent overtones.

Sense of direction. Another element which we suggest should be included in this subset also pertains to the member's grasp of the activity. It is important that the class members perceive a sense of direction. The members view the activity as one that does not have specified objectives, but has sufficient purpose and goal imagery to provide direction. There is a means and end to the activity. Even though the end is unclear, it is perceived by the members as one that will provide an opportunity for each to satisfy his needs and meet his general expectations. In our classroom experiences, we have heard this sense of direction verbalized when a member has said, "I'm not exactly certain where this discussion will take us, but I have the strong feeling that we are moving in a right direction."

Reward from experiencing the experience. This condition exists for the class member when the major source of positive feeling which he extracts from a learning experience is the pleasure or excitement of being within it. Thus, the content studied, methods employed, achievement of objectives, persons present, or gifts bestowed are not cited separately as the sources of reward. Instead, the sense of being in touch with a stream of vital, undifferentiated experience is identified as the major positiveness and source of motivation for a similar future experience. It is possible for persons to move through a learning experience and yet not consciously experience the experience they moved through. An example which comes to mind is a recent episode in which class members were struggling to sharpen their listening skills through tedious practice and feedback from each other. Some members emerged from that activity with positive feeling about their end achievements but negativeness about the exhausting experience.

Others cited with equal positiveness the skills acquired and an excitement of being participants in and witness to the array of actions as they unfolded. Many persons are deprived of this source of reward. For class members to know and use this source of reward apparently necessitates the elimination or reduction of the usual rewards in classroom learning and the freeing of students from both concerns about specified achievement and editing their behaviors and thoughts.

b. Perception of Interpersonal Relationships

A second set of variables is concerned with interpersonal dynamics. In an energizing experience it is of fundamental importance that the interpersonal facet of it be recognized. The variables we have identified are influenced by the perceptions and behaviors of the class members as they interact with each other.

Legitimacy of ignorance. The participant feels that being unfamiliar with the content or material is an acceptable situation. This feeling is not limited to the class member-instructor relationship; it also includes the relationships between members. In other words, it is okay to be unacquainted with the affective or cognitive information being discussed and, further, it is acceptable to display one's ignorance. Hence, ignorance is not deprecated and the class member is not punished by others within the classroom. Further, the possession of ignorance on an issue may even be viewed as a state of being that allows the possessor to have a perspective of the issue which is unique, and of special resource to the class. We have experienced the manifestation of this condition when, in the midst of a sophisticated discussion of a complex theoretical construct, a less-informed class member raises a profoundly simple question, which suddenly calls everyone's attention to the central, basic issue and brings a shared clarity to the exploration.

Commitment to the best. Another important variable which influences the emergence of an energizing experience is the class member's commitment to the importance of each person receiving maximum benefit. In this respect, the commitment is not limited to a concern and desire for the maximum benefit for just one's self. Rather, the member is concerned about the best for others involved in the activity as well and perceives himself as participating in an activy that will prove to be beneficial for all who participate. As a consequence, the member senses attitudes and behaviors among fellow participants that they too are interested in the best for him. There is no vindictiveness or bitterness evidenced by the members as they interact with each other.

Valuing the person. When a class member feels accepted apart from his skills or status and when he senses the genuine interest of others in him as a human entity, then he is very likely experiencing the condition of his person being valued for its own sake. Immediately following an energizing experience, we have seen class members turn to their peers and express deep appreciation for allowing them to be precisely what they are, peculiarities and all. A relationship seems to exist between the class members that suggests that each is perceived and appreciated as an inherently worthy individual regardless of his qualifications. There is, at least for moments in time, an unconditional positive regard for each other.

Respect for competency in role. Closely related to the sense of freedom derived from being one's self is the feeling of liberation produced by being respected and accepted as a competent class member, student, or learner. It is important that there be little need for the member to justify his legitimacy for being in the class. He is there and that is enough. Neither instructor nor fellow class members challenge the individual's admission, appearance, or participation in the class. In this respect, the individual member is not asked to present his credentials in

order to validate his participation, and to some degree certain qualities of expertness are ascribed to each member. Members experience equality in their role relationships with each other.

Awareness of the presence of others. We have heard class members describe a sense of self-arousal by their sudden realization of their being in the midst of either a clear or hazy surrounding of other persons. Sometimes this has been described as an experience of pressure to act, other times as an excitement over the possibility of experiencing a precious moment of multiple human contact, and still other times as a sea of immediate resources for intellectual and emotional support and stimulation. The experiencing of this condition is the opposite of feeling isolated, psychologically distant, and having an impression of a mutually limited view between self and other. Some class members have described this as an illusion of overlappingness with others.

2. Learning Task.

Still referring to Figure 1, the following is an attempt to describe each of the conditions of the learning task. Once again, these are conditions within the realm of our own limited experience and it is not our intent to imply completeness.

Dilemma. For this condition to be activated, the class member feels himself in the midst of choice between alternatives, each of which has consequences that affect him in some personal way. The alternatives may surface unresolved value conflicts, raise value resolutions from a state of complacency to a state of reconsideration and tension, rotate an issue to a previously unconsidered perspective, re-open a solved or laid-aside problem by a redefinition of it or an introduction of new data.

Self-disclosure. This condition "happens" for a class member when he unveils, makes manifest, shows, or opens to the view of others selected or unselected aspects of his self. The immediately foregoing use of "his self" rather than "himself" defines the self as an object in the possession of the member which, if revealed,

can become observable to the member and to others. The disclosure of self to others may occur through a variety of direct and indirect means and may result in feelings of exposure, contact, or vulnerability. Disclosure by one member has the potential of stimulating further disclosures by others. As well as self-disclosing to others, a member may experience his own internal self-disclosure as some act or thought reveals a new aspect of his self to him or allows him to gain a new perspective on some previously revaled aspects of self. In a sense, one's internal self-disclosure or disclosure of self to others provides a heightened moment of confirmation of one's existence.

Risk. For this condition to be actualized for the class member, he must take an action in the public setting of the classroom -- an action which he perceives as having potential threat to the maintenance of self and social esteem. Actions which have no threat potential for the member, are not viewed here as risk. Self-disclosure as described above can be a risk-taking act, depending on the nature of both the disclosure and the recipients of the disclosure.

Feedback. This condition comes into existence for a class member when he receives information about his thinking, feeling, or behaving from others in the classroom through either direct or indirect, casual or purposely planned procedures. The information may be confirming or disconfirming of his prior beliefs, and pleasing or unpleasing to receive. The reception of a feedback message as it was fully intended by the giver often involves a face-to-face contact between giver and reciever.

Our theory about the creation of the energizing experience is summed up in the following formulation in which the Energizing Experience is a function of the Task factors of dilemma (d), self-disclosure (s), risk (ri), and feedback (f), times the Environment factors of expectation (e) of vital experience, uncertainty (u) of outcome, optimism (o) about outcome, sense (s) of direction,

reward (re) from experiencing the experience, legitimacy (l) of ignorance, commitment (c) to the best, valuing (v) the person, respect (r) for competency in role, and awareness (a) of the presence of others.

$$EE \; f \; T \times E.$$

where T = (d,s,ri,f) and E = (e,u,o,s,re,l,c,v,r,a)

and thus,

$$EE \; f \; (d,s,ri,f) \times (e,u,o,s,re,l,c,v,r,a)$$

We are uncertain about the nature of f and the particular nature of the relationships between each of the factors within the domain of T and the domain of E.

Some Implications for Teaching Behavior & Practice

As portrayed in Figure 1, the instructor is the major source of influence in the facilitation of an energizing experience for class members. It appears to us that the instructor has a multivariate impact on the extent to which certain conditions exist which, in turn, interface with the student's experiencing of energy. The message of the instructor's presentation of self and presentation of learning task has several sources. Two sources of the instructor's presentation of self are the instructor's beliefs about the nature of the person, interpersonal relationships, teaching, and learning; and the instructor's behavior in the classroom setting. The beliefs which we view as having a deterministic type of linkage to the essential conditions for energy are:

1) that the basic, core, or root purpose for which persons enter and engage in relationships with others is is to confirm their own existence and to validate the goodness of their contribution during it. The perceptual consequence of this belief is that of viewing all efforts of the student as the student's best-of-the-moment attempt

to generate evidence toward a presence rather than an absence of being and a positiveness rather than negativeness of social value during that presence.

2) that persons do not resist action or change; they seek it as part of their inherent nature. What persons do resist are expected consequences which will diminish their self or social esteem. The behavioral consequences of this belief for the instructor is that of being assertive at promoting, simultaneously, an activeness of the student and a realization by the student of the student's own power to decide whether or not and how to act.

The instructional behaviors which we view as influencing the extent to which conditions for energy are present are those which can be classified as being:

1) supportively invitational. These take the form of verbal and non-verbal manifestations which carry content and message character that reach out and warmly solicit the student's involvement. They increase the likelihood of approach and decrease the likelihood of avoidance.

2) nonintrusively encouraging. These, again, are verbal and non-verbal communications which beckon the student toward participation and, almost at the same time, allow for, clarify options of, and unconditionally respect the student's decision to take part or not. They increase the likelihood of class members not being overly-threatened by the potential consequences of their own participation.

3) authentically self-sharing. This means that the instructor is not acting a self or is not engaging in a conscious effort to present his self, but, instead, has entered into a stream of collaborative adventure and exploration with class members. This does not mean that the instructor is fully disclosing of all his thoughts and feelings at all

moments. It is intended to mean that the instructor has enough comfort with the state of his presence--whatever it may be--that he doesn't feel the need to manipulate its nature to fit the expectations he perceives members having of him.

4) non-defensively vital. This classification includes behaviors which demonstrate a personal comfort with uncertainty and conflict, ongoing commitment to explore unturned issues, and a perseverance to pursue the task to the "bitter end."

There are several awarenesses and skills involved in the instructor's presentation and facilitation of a learning task which we view as being highly influential on the extent to which the task will actually be energy-inducing. Two of these awarenesses are:

1) consciousness of the existence of communication nuances. This refers to the possession of a knowledge and imagery of the partial and indirect expressions of thought, feeling, and behavior which carry some type of intent or meaning by the sender of the expression. These messages and meta-messages are usually outside the conception of reality of most persons and pass as non-phenomena in the interactions between class members.

2) consciousness of the impact of proxemic factors on thought, feeling, and behavior. This refers to a knowledge and imagery of the function of space and position in human interaction, and an awareness that the immediate environment is a source of message and meta-message to persons who exist within it.

Five of the presentation and facilitation skills which we suggest as being determiners of the energy-induction consequences of a task are:

1) stating clear and logically limited requests for participation. When this occurs, the class member has concrete imagery of the task at hand and does not experience instruction overload.

2) non-distortive, reflective listening. When the instructor can lay out, in bold relief, at a moment in time, for all to consensually hear, a member's contribution -- then the full impact of the member's presence and the feedback of that experience of presence upon the member can serve to affirm the member's perception of his existence and its importance in the group.

3) interpersonal and situational scanning acuity. This heightened awareness of mainly non-verbal cues allows the instructor to surface aspirations, needs, perspectives, feelings, and puzzlements which are withholdingly seeking expression.

4) setting spatial, positional, and artifactual arrangements which reduce ecological constraints to interaction and communication. This takes the form of either managing or facilitating the deployment of chairs, tables, equipment, and materials and the levels of sound within the immediate scene of experience.

5) facilitating the focused gathering of learnings. Motivation to continue involvement has some dependence upon the extraction of time-to-time insights from situationally developmental interactions. This also would appear to contribute to members' optimism about eventual outcome of experience and provide a sense of constructive moment.

The implications for teaching behavior and practice which we have considered to this point, spring mainly from the socio-emotional environment component of our theory. These implications have been framed in terms of instructor beliefs, behaviors, awarenesses, and skills. The implications which emerge from the learning task

component of our theory seem more relevant to the characteristics of the learning task or tasks presented by the instructor. The direct implications for the tasks are that they are most likely to be energizing if they are cast within a design which promotes the facing of dilemmas, the taking of risks, the receiving of feedback, and the disclosure of personally meaningful information by class members. A wide variety of such designs for participative classroom learning of concepts, skills, and attitudes in the social and communcation sciences have been published and are available to interested instructors (12).

The External and Internal Nature of Becoming and Being Energized

It would seem that the external, behavioral manifestations of being energized are amenable to observation and coding. There may already exist components of a taxonomy of behaviors indicative of energy, and it may even be possible to rank these behaviors so as to indicate what quantity of internally experienced energy is at the source of each behavior.

On the other hand, it is possible that there may not be any external behaviors which carry the truly same or similar meaning of the nature, quality, or quantity of internally experienced energy for all persons. The external, behavioral expression of internally experienced energy may turn out to be a more idiosyncratic than universal phenomenon. Also, in asking people to describe their internal energy experiences, it is possible that words which are presently available and their established meanings, which are an extra-organism issue, are as yet inadequate to the task of universal expression of common experiences of energy which are an intra-organism issue. Further, the possibility exists that external expressions of energy experiences are so culturally bound, that culture-free terms need to be created for the communication of universal meanings. All this is to say that new words or new constellations of currently available words may need to be invented for the valid and reliable, universal, external expression of in-

ternally experienced energy. We would not agree with the somtimes proposed position that attempts to translate bodily sensations of an affective order into cognitions do, by their very nature, a kind of violence to the sensations. We believe that sufficient congruency can exist between body and mind for the latter to adequately translate phenomena within the former. Whatever the case, it is clear to us that the assignment of internal meanings to external behaviors is, at its best, inferential and problematic.

Beyond this problem of external expression of internal events, the specific nature of the internal happening of energy and its internal physical or meta-physical locations are mysteries to us. We are perplexed over the nature and location of the internal happenings of energy when class members make such statements as: "I was touched deeply by that experience"; "I was deeply moved"; "I felt something important going on inside myself."

We are puzzled over what fragments of a designed activity or moment of interaction are the stimuli for being "touched" internally, but we believe that the experience of being energized in the classroom has a beginning or rise at the moment of impact of some minimum amounts of the several factors designated in our theory and a decline or an ending at the reduction of the amounts of these factors. We have almost no idea about how these factors inter-relate and what the inter-relationship requirements are at the moment of their production of an energizing experience.

The abundance of uncertainty and unclarity which surrounds the testing of the theory proposed here has at least three effects upon us: we are overwhelmed with the complexity of the task; fascinated by the possibility of discovering or creating new concepts, such as new internal psychological domains of the person that are the receivers of touch and transformers of touch into energy; and amused at the possibility of finding that it was all just a beautiful fantasy with no relationship to reality.

In an effort to bring some order to the elements and issues involved in testing the theory, Figure 2 is presented as an illustration of the sequence of these elements and the issues which are

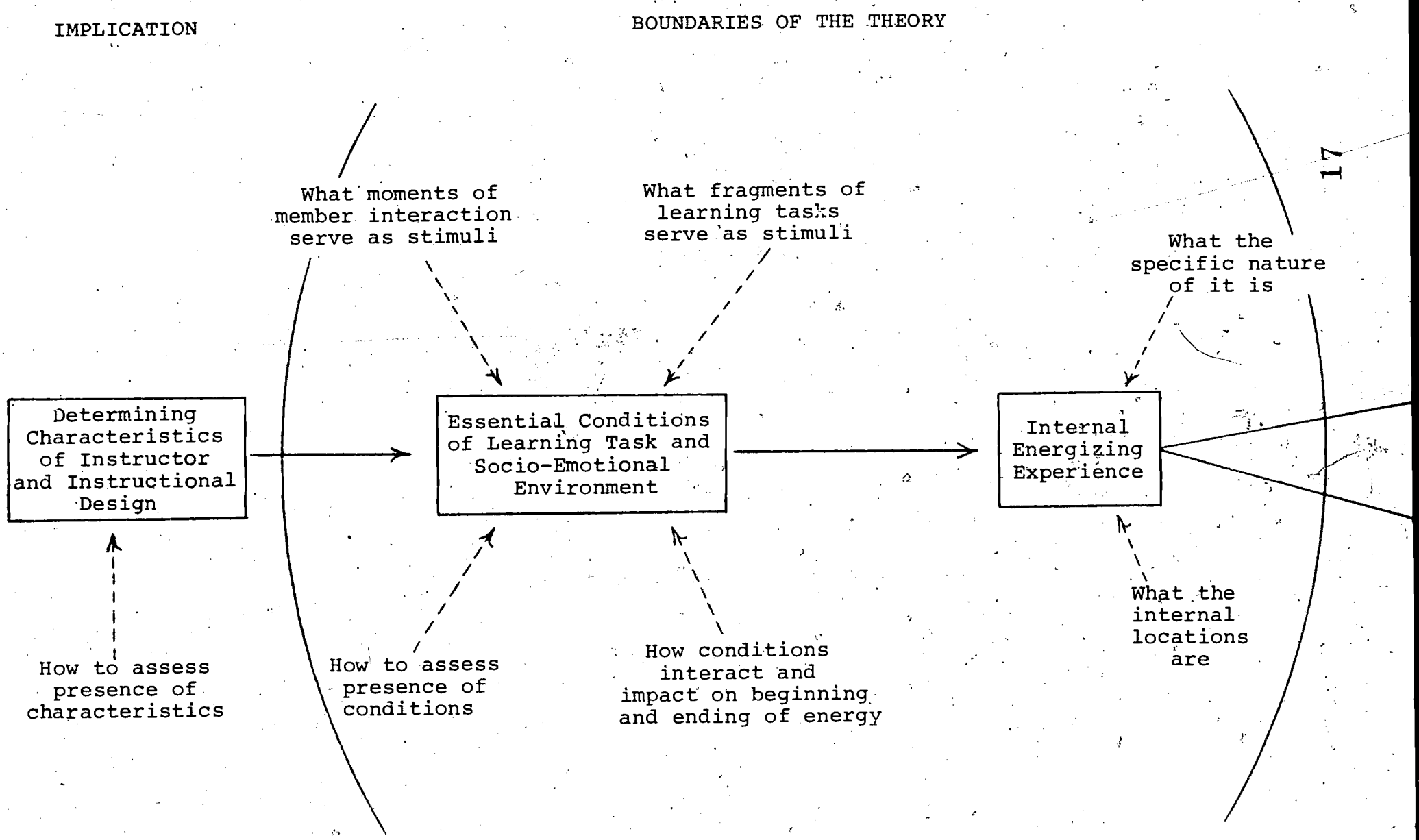
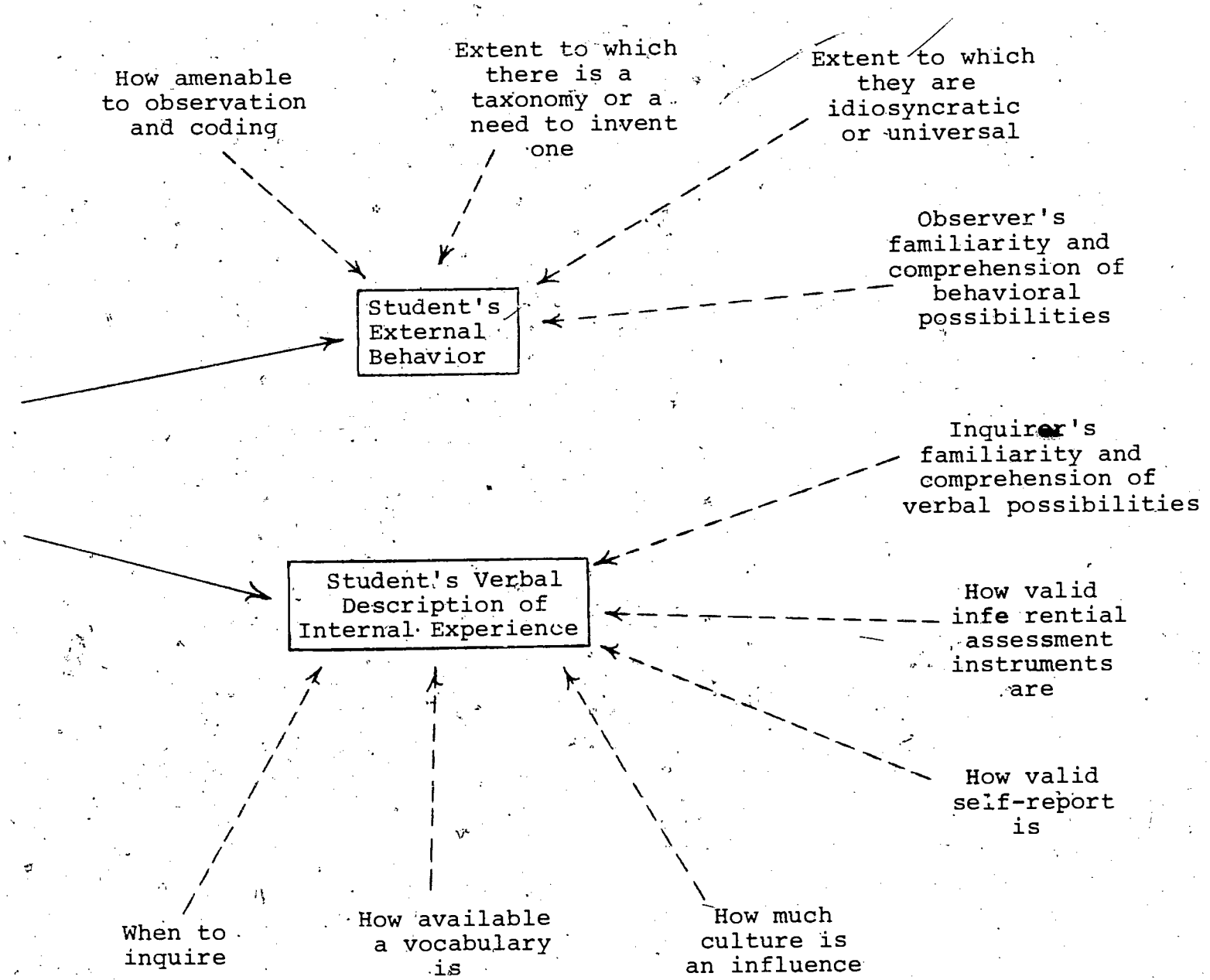


FIG. 2. Schematic representation of a sequence of elements involved in testing the theory and exploring associated issues

ASSESSMENT OF ENERGIZING EXPERIENCE



associated with them. Our current thinking about where to begin in testing the theory is initially very simplistic and informal. We plan to try very brief, potentially energizing, instructional tasks with small classes of adults while collecting self-report, instrumented, and observational information--facing each issue as it arises in the sequence.

The literature which focuses on the relationships between concepts in our theory and between concepts and energy appears very limited. An ERIC search with twenty-nine descriptors, in documents published over the past 5 years, yielded nine relevant items. These nine items are among those listed under References at the end of this paper.

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