

HUMANISTIC EDUCATION: A MANIFESTO

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Man can live by no other images  
than those he creates

The word 'humanism' first designated an intellectual movement which reached its peak during the Italian Renaissance of the 15th century. The humanist movement was considered "freedom of thought" because it represented a break away from the Medieval Scholastic Church philosophers. This original humanist movement emphasized classical studies as the preferred route to liberated, critical thinking.

Erasmus of Rotterdam, one of the most noteworthy Renaissance thinkers, wrote what was for that time a great book entitled On Free Will. It was Erasmus's effort to define "inner freedom" which most directly links that early movement with the modern humanistic ethos of liberation. Today, humanistic thinking can be applied not only to projects of the arts and philosophy but also to those of psychology and education.

Liberation of individuals and societies from destructive social conditions such as wars, tyranny, violence, and prejudice; from demeaning economic conditions such as poverty, starvation, want, slavery and indebtedness; and from spiritual impoverishment such as anomie, depersonalization, ignorance, fear apathy and valuelessness has long been a goal of humanism. Liberation is: movement toward the goal of autonomy. Throughout history - since at least Socrates - the autonomous individual is one who decides and takes responsibility for the consequences of that decision.

To those whose minds are not liberated, wars, revolutions, and radical movements will never bring freedom but only an exchange of one kind of slavery for another. That is one of the most tragic lessons of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kaufmann, W. Without Guilt and Justice  
New York: Wyden, 1973, preface.

Human beings, as individuals, and collectively, create the societies and social institutions which in turn become their habitat. What we create depends, at least in part, on the images we hold of ourselves—personally, socially and futuristically. We should recognize that some images are healthy and urge us towards ever greater humanity while others are at best stultifying and at worst destructive. The image of man as a machine, or a mere cog in the machine, is an example of the latter for this image reduces man to status of "nothing but". A more hopeful image of man, for example: man as creator, builds man up and holds out the possibility of man becoming more than he now is. While man may not be perfectable, he is improveable.

A pedagogic ideal which has been formulated in nearly all societies by philosophers and educational visionaries throughout history has been the goal that education should bring about:

The physical, intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the individual into a complete man.<sup>2</sup>

Even in an advanced industrial society such as Canada there is little doubt that the great majority of citizens are, at the completion of their schooling, still very incomplete persons. One is tempted to say that a society such as contemporary Canadian society (in no sense different from most other technologically advanced cultures) is premature for the development of integrated personalities.

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<sup>2</sup>Faure, E., et.al. Learning To Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow. London: George Harrap & Co. (UNESCO), 1972, p. 156.

Healthy self image is intimately bound up with social structures: family, school, church, politics, and economics. Only those who have respect and confidence in their own personal identity can create healthy social goals and guide change as both they and their social context move into the future. "Miseries, humiliations, embarrassments, accidents have the effect of creating partial self-images - self-images which, since they present themselves as complete, are bound to be false."<sup>3</sup>

Social change is permanently with us. For the first time in history, education must try to prepare individuals for types of society which, for the most part, do not yet exist. Because of its inelasticity institutionalized education recently has been, is, and will continue to be, under criticism.

Educational reform shows itself in four trends. One consists of the reforming and restructuring of educational structures and modernizing teaching methods. On the token level, this type of reform is to be found almost everywhere. A second, and closely related reform movement is the attempt to restructure the school as an integral part of the community. In Yugoslavia, for example, schools are run by councils of delegates representing teachers, pupils, parents and the local community. A third reform effort is that of radical criticism exemplified by I. Illich and his thesis for the 'de-schooling' of society. In his view, institutionalized education is incapable of developing an individual's capacity for independent, creative relationships with other people and the environment. Contrarily, schooling serves the purposes of repressiveness, alienation and dehumanization.

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<sup>3</sup>Wilson, C. New Pathways in Psychology. New York: Taplinger, 1972, p. 261.

In this view, schools are a form of captivity rather than liberation.

A fourth reform movement is that of dissent - engaged in recently by pupils, now more the mode of teachers and parents. Student dissent, while often naive and transitory, did open a breach in the bastion of educational conservatism and status-quoism. Increasingly, parents who notice negative effects of schooling in their children voice their dissent both in the direction of retrenchment and liberation. Apathy - teacher apathy, parent apathy, and, most of all student apathy - are all forms of dissent.

Humanistic psychology, while not an entirely coherent system of thought, does embody certain principles which have direct application to education - especially if we are concerned with the improvement of education. Humanistic psychology offers an orientation to people, their goals, their activities as well as their problems. I will briefly numerate nine aspects of this orientation.

Image. Humanism offers a hopeful image of man. The individual is construed as active, deciding, thinking, feeling, creating, loving. Granted that no one ever completely fulfills this image, it is humanistic psychology's promise that most of mankind can make headway toward this image. Mankind is not correctly portrayed by the image of the machine, the rat, or the devil.

Wholeness. To make sense to, and about, humans, one's emphasis must be on the wholeness of person. Self-concept use may help us to construe individuals as whole entities. Each of us is at any instant, the mutual interaction and integration of all our ongoing processes. For most purposes

in learning and education as well as counselling and therapy, it is a mistake to fractionate the person into separate processes.

Consciousness. What sets man apart from everything else is his consciousness. Education is, in its better sense, a true effort to increase consciousness. Consciousness-raising means seeing more, being aware of more contradictions around us, gaining more information, understanding more. A critical consciousness is one which perceives contradictions in personal and social reality and analyses how those contradictions work to one's advantage or disadvantage and perceives how personal and social change can occur so that one can increase the quality of one's life.

Subjectivity. Traditional theory says that one should strive for objectivity - even to the point of regarding others as 'objects'. Humanistic psychology holds that each person is a person(al) being. Each has his intimate view of the world, i.e., experiences himself, others and his environment from a personal, subjective orientation. Rather than regarding this as necessarily bad and something to be avoided, humanistic psychology states that it is mainly from our own subjectivity that life can take on meaning. meaning.

Problems. Humanistic psychology emphasizes that psychology and education should assist the individual to cope with, and solve when possible, the concrete problems he encounters. This aid may take various forms: knowledge, attitudes, skills, concepts, new behaviors. We do not learn for 'learning's sake'. We learn to understand and change ourselves and the world.

Values. From the humanistic perspective, there is no such condition as one which is value-free. Man is a valuing creature. Values are not to be avoided or denied; rather, they are to be preferred - some being

better than others in guiding the conduct of life.

Creativity. Maslow thought creativity to be a potential given to all human beings at birth. He believed that most persons lost or failed to develop creativity as they were enculturated (educated). However, some retained it and others seemed to recover their creativity later in life. In his words:

...creativity appears in some of our subjects not in the usual form...books...music...(art) but rather may be much more humble. It is as if this special type of creativity, being an expression healthy personality, is projected out on the world or touches whatever activity the person is engaged in.<sup>4</sup>

The study of creativity has played an outstanding role in European psychology. Humanistic psychology places creativity as a central principle in its theory through the maxim: man creates himself.

Understanding. In humanistic psychology the goal of understanding is given priority over prediction and control. Understanding is the individual's ground for humane action. Autonomy grows out of understanding.

Relationships. Man exists as a personal being. Paradoxically he exists only through co-existence. No infant could be without his mother. Friendship, mating, family, community, nation - all require co-existence, i.e., relationship. We can never understand the individual except as he is in a given social context. We always require others for our own definition. For there to be a pupil, there must be a teacher; to be a judge, one must have a thief; a master, a slave, etc.

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<sup>4</sup>Maslow, A. H. Motivation and Personality. New York: Harper & Row, 1954 (2nd Ed. 1970)

Humanizing the classroom is not an easy task. The general orientation of the teacher is probably more important than particular techniques which may have a humanizing result. C. Rossiter<sup>5</sup> has examined the literature of humanistic psychology and has composed five maxims which capture most of the important elements of a humanistic orientation to the classroom.

1. Be concerned with the development of the whole person, i.e., physical, intellectual, emotional, ethical integration.
2. Treat students as persons who have a right to humane and healthy relationships and environments.
3. Recognize the importance of direct, honest, reliable relationships and remember that most significant learning (for better or for worse) takes place in the context of interpersonal relationships.
4. Know yourself as fully as you can. Bring yourself to the classroom as fully as you can. In other words, be present yourself.
5. Do not teach by formula.

As informed and deliberate individuals we have the capacity to act upon our social and personal realities and, in so doing, transform them. To do this we must decide - decide upon the images of our future which we prefer, decide to critically examine the social realities which we are presently imbedded in, decide which specific issues we wish to act upon so that we may move from potentiality to actuality in transforming schools from less to more humanized environments. Not only will we be acting to improve the quality of educational life for pupils young and old, but in acting we will be transforming ourselves from less to more autonomous beings.

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<sup>5</sup>Rossiter, C. Maxims for humanizing education. Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 16(Winter) 1976, 75-80.

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