

# ALTERNATIVE TO ALIENATION

F

## PAUL BRUCE

Associate Professor of Education, San Diego  
State College, San Diego, California

MY IMPRESSION of the status of the profession of education is that, since the death of John Dewey and the fading away of the progressivists, it has been wallowing in a state of alienation with no marked sense of direction or purpose. With the advent of the Sputnik furore, the field of education was forced into a partial and very narrow answer to this problem of alienation with the emphasis which was placed on mathematics, science, and foreign language. Interestingly, the push and direction in these fields did not come from the profession of education but from the particular disciplines themselves, which meant that the place of these disciplines within the perspective of the entire educational picture was often distorted.

Another example of education's alienation was the way technological advances in instruction—educational television, automated instruction, team teaching, etc.—were introduced on the scene with little (if any) consideration of the overall goals of education and what their proper place might be relative to these goals. As a result, I believe, many schools expended much needed funds on hardware (teaching machines, elaborate television setups, schoolroom modifications) which they are not quite sure what to do with now.

An illustration of this was an expensive closed-circuit television system which was provided in one school with which I am familiar before anyone had any idea of what to do with it. Committees were quickly formed to find ways of using the facility so the funds could be justified to the legislature. Most educators believe that the educationally sound practice is to develop a meaningful program relative to certain objectives and *then* find the most effective ways of implementing the program. However, it would seem that this technological revolution has put the cart before the horse. This has come about because of the philosophical vacuum which, I believe, exists in the field today.

One of the reasons for or consequences of this philosophical vacuum is the fact that the profession has been, and still is, on the defensive. We are constantly reacting and hardly ever proposing. Furthermore, and perhaps as another symptom of the vacuum, we do not have prominent spokesmen to react vigorously,

articulating and defining the profession's position; nor do we have effective, influential leadership proposing or defining goals which the profession can proudly hold up as setting direction. As a matter of fact, probably the most influential spokesman for the profession is James Bryant Conant, a chemist and scholar who has never been associated formally with the public schools. This is not to speak of the self-proclaimed spokesmen who exploit the vacuum by attacking and trying to destroy the profession and attempting to substitute their own particular pet solutions which, to say the least, tend to be narrow and unrealistic.

## Defensive Stance

In contrast to this situation, the field of educational psychology has problems of a different sort. Rather than alienation, psychology is plagued with its professionals very strongly identified with movements and schools of thought which tend to be quite incompatible with one another, leading to friction and bitterness within the field.

In general, there are three major influences in psychology today: scientific psychology, probably the most popular among academic psychologists, which is deterministic with the focus on observable behavior; psychoanalysis, most influential among the clinical and abnormal psychologists, which is also deterministic with focus on analysis of deep-seated, underlying causes of behavior; and humanistic psychology, which appeals to those who want to bring philosophy and values back into psychology, and which emphasizes man's potential freedom and self-determinism.

I mention the contrasting status of psychology here, because I think education could use what psychology has too much of—commitment to a system of ideas or school of thought defining purpose and direction. Also I see at least two of the three general psychological movements as offering education opportunity to jump on the bandwagon. I speak of scientific psychology and humanistic psychology, leaving out psychoanalysis, which tends to be too clinically oriented to have much appeal to educators.

Scientific psychology already has a head start in its appeal to some educators because so much of its concern is and has been with the psychology of learning—the area in which the schools are primarily interested. Historically this branch has had much to say about school learning, and much of educational psychology makes use of principles developed there. Today, programmed instruction (teaching machines) is the most recent example of application of these principles. *If* you know what you want to teach, this branch of psychology has means for investigating the most efficient means for getting it taught.

The problem lies with the "if" in the preceding statement. This movement in psychology is of no help to an educational profession without a philosophy. In fact, I see it as being detrimental to the extent that technology is developed without due consideration given to the content which is to be utilized by the technology. Accepting scientific psychology does not solve education's problem of a commitment to a philosophy. (It is one thing for scientific psychology to embrace

logical positivism for its philosophical support, but this is no answer to education's dilemma.)

## Humanism

My own preference and commitment is to the humanistic movement in psychology. Unlike scientific psychology, this school does not beg the question of values. Implicit in their formulations is the basic assumption of the inherent "goodness" of human nature. In fact, for some, "goodness" is defined as that which is basically natural. Development of man's basic human potential becomes the goal and purpose of this movement. The emphasis and focus are not on what an individual has been but on what he is and can become. Thus it is a positive, forward looking, progressive philosophy.

Also basic to this school of thought is the assumption of man's inherent capabilities of being rational and self-determining. Thus the movement (unlike the two other forces in psychology) is consistent and compatible with our democratic heritage and our cultural ideal. Focus here is on the uniqueness and integrity of the individual deemphasizing the understanding of man in terms of norms or averages. "Nomothetic" science, whereby populations of individuals are studied segmentally and described statistically, is replaced by "idiographic" science, whereby individuals are studied as integrated units in their own right, and reported descriptively and dynamically. *Individuality* is stressed over the principle of individual differences.

For education this new movement in psychology offers a challenge as well as an alternative to its present state of alienation. (Some in education have recognized this challenge, as evidenced by the 1962 Yearbook of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development entitled *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming*.) Actually, this psychology provides a framework in which much of what is already substantiated as good, effective educational practice can logically fit. Humanistic psychology provides a rationale for child-centered, individual-centered education. It lends itself beautifully to the recent emphasis on creativity. Its broad goals of self-actualization (self-fulfillment, self-realization) encourage breadth as well as depth of the curriculum—cognitive development in all subject and skill areas as well as conative, emotional development of the person as a dynamic, integrated human being.

Rather than grading practice being discouraging and defeating as it presently is for many (because of the unrealistic practice of using a single, normative standard whereby success is not attainable by all), under humanistic principles, the evaluation process can become encouraging and positive since progress would be noted in terms of each student's potential. This suggestion may be considered too idealistic for many to accept; on the other hand, convincing evidence is mounting from many sources in psychology on the importance of success over failure experiences (positive over negative reinforcement) for effective learning situations.

From the standpoint of curriculum, all subject or skill areas can find their place

within the purview of humanistic psychology and philosophy. Emphasis shifts, however, from absolute standards of excellence to excellence according to each student's potential in that subject area. Emphasis also shifts from a common standard curriculum for all to tailor-made curricula to meet unique needs and talents of individual students. (The present experimentation with multi-grade classes, flexible scheduling, etc., would find a philosophical home here.) Instruction thus becomes freed from the chains of evaluation and curriculum as they presently exist (based on single and absolute standards) to become indeed individualized and thus more realistically consistent with what psychology has shown to be effective.

Under this philosophy, guidance would have a prominent function and one compatible with the entire educational program instead of supplementary to it as it is now. The concern of guidance for the promotion of and the provision for the individuality of each student would become central to the educational establishment.

Indeed, if education could identify itself (even in part) with this humanistic movement, many of its current problems, though not all would be solved, would be set on a course toward solution. There would be a philosophical base for experimentation, for making curricular and instructional decisions, for meeting the public with a sound, challenging program, for reacting to unfounded attacks, for developing a dedicated, creative leadership.

More and More  
School Districts  
Are Adopting  
this Proven  
Phonics Program  
Supplementing  
the Early  
Development of  
Communicative  
Skills:

**LISTENING**  
**READING**  
**WRITING**  
**SPELLING**  
**SPEAKING**

**THE PHONOVISUAL  
METHOD can be  
used with any  
series of readers.**

*Teach Phonics  
Easily, Quickly by*

**THE  
PhonoVisual<sup>®</sup>  
METHOD**



The electric success of the Phonovisual Method is based upon the use of two scientifically planned pictorial charts . . . consonant and vowel . . . game-like procedures and additional supporting aids. It strengthens a child's ability to attack independently the phonetic words that comprise nearly 80% of the English language.

Inquiries Invited. Ask about "Phonovisual in Action"  
(16mm demonstration film with sound track). Write to:

**PHONOVISUAL PRODUCTS, INC. Dept. EL-5**  
**4708 Wisconsin Ave., Washington, D. C. 20016**

In Canada: Educator Supplies, Ltd.  
105 Falcon Street, London, Ontario

Copyright © 1966 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.