



# The Humanities and the Curriculum

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**W**ITH the establishment in 1965 of the National Council, Endowment, and Foundation for the Humanities, the community of education has been encouraged to seek a finer understanding of the nature and role of the humanities in the life and education of man. The search for such understanding is not new. The debates comprise a span from Plato's *Republic* to the current journals. Yet, there persists some sense of uncertainty and confusion.

One might wish to believe that two millennia would have been sufficient time to resolve the questions with which we still seem plagued, and to sort out the labels and categories which have made the discourse difficult: humanism, humanize, humanness, humanities, liberal education, as well as the operational structures (educational processes? designs?) claiming to bridge the whole range. McClellan (33) has suggested that we must inquire further into what it is to "teach the humanities" in order to clarify the discussion.

This paper is directed toward that goal, and seeks to deal informally with two basic questions: (a) What is the nature of the humanities in the curriculum? and (b) How can the current discourse be dealt with in curriculum terms?

While the humanism of the Renaissance sought to escape the dogmatism and scholas-

ticism of the Middle Ages, educational concerns with the humanities in recent discourse have involved a wider spread of difficulties, including the whole content-process spectrum. Some writers sense a threat to their domain of inquiry, or to the place of the humanities in the curriculum, from the social and natural sciences, or simply from an overly "cognitive" or "technical" (rather than "humane"?) orientation. They have sought to assert distinctions among the humanities, social (human) sciences, and natural sciences, both in an effort to demonstrate the humanities' worth and to appeal for place and emphasis in education. Eisner summarizes this position:

American schools, so long concerned with helping children become competent in the "cognitive" fields, are now beginning to turn their attention to the arts and humanities. . . . educators . . . who once pressed for a heavier dose of the "solids," are now beginning to suspect that something has been missing in this emphasis. Perhaps they are now willing to consider that the study of man's perennial problems as exemplified in the humanities and the education of man's sensibilities as developed through the arts might be a needed counter-thrust to the emphasis placed upon the sciences and upon mathematics over the past 15-year period (22).

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Along these same lines, there has also been some appeal for more discussion of the role of the humanities, in a functional or instrumental sense, over and above their intrinsic worth (18, 23, 25, Combs in 31, 35, 36, 37). Frye (40) has suggested that the humanities are distinguished from the sciences not so much by their subject matter as by some peculiar method and mental attitudes. The inquiry into the nature of this method and these attitudes reflects a wide range of conceptualizations of learning and of the humanities. Bruner (18) and others have emphasized the humanities as inference pools of human experience through which to study and understand the causes and consequences of choices. Some writers (25, 29, Jenkins in 32, 39, Beardsley in 40) have underlined "cognitive" structures and development. Richards (36) and others see the humanities as "mediators" through which one may come to insights. Jacobs (15) and Winthrop (43) see both "cognitive" and "non-cognitive" elements in the humanities as ways to discourse and to non-discourse. Horn (quoted in 25)<sup>1</sup> has argued, on the other side, that all these concepts of function are so much folklore.

Other writers, dealing more with philosophical and practical questions of selection and organization within the humanities themselves, at all levels of education, have suggested that scholars must deal more directly with the problem of what it is to be "truly human." They have looked at the humanities, as taught in the schools, and decried a wide range of conditions: tendencies to mystical abstractions and bull sessions (23, Beardsley in 40); mediocrity and a loss of taste and fundamental spiritual values (Jacobs in 15, Lippmann quoted in 20, 27); pragmatism and anarchy (37); dillittantism and a new scholasticism (36). Howard Mumford Jones has noted this last:

Rather, what I am trying to do is to shock you into a sense of how the aristocratic spirit which lurks in scholarship, the samurai spirit of specialism, has carried us away from the

<sup>1</sup> His conclusions are to some extent also shared in 17 and 19.

rather central problem of the education of the human race (28).

In addition to these concerns with the contents of the humanities, there has also been much discussion of the humanities as process. Broudy (17) has suggested that the two are not separable if the humanities are to have any claims as means to "evaluational education." The idea of humanizing through a study of the humanities, and that of "humanistic" education or learning, have a rich heritage from Erasmus and Montaigne to the present. Questions about becoming, aware-ing, involvement, and relevance have been raised by Maslow (7), Rogers (31), and others (13, 30); and for many these are as central to the task-achievement sense of "teaching the humanities" as basic cognitive skills and the structures of disciplines. This question of the process sense of the humanities, however, has not stopped with discussion of curricula so labeled, but rather has extended to the entire issue of "humanizing" education to the very core. Paul Goodman, Jonathan Kozol, and many others have directed public attention to the idea of a dehumanization of man, both by technology and science and by his system of education (schooling?). Goodlad has indeed reported:

In schools run by humans, we have not succeeded in developing intensely humanistic learning environments—not in process, not in content, and not in perspective. The schools do not, in general, foster man's more creative traits, nor grapple with his great ideas, nor relate these ideas and talents to the contemporary environment where man's dreams are continuously re-enacted. The schools are bogged down with routine, trivialities, and the lesser literacies . . . schooling has lost sight of education as an end in itself and has become instrumental to the next textbook, the next grade, higher education, and the Gross National Product. And now . . . the computer comes into this human-based environment. . . . Will the computer dehumanize learning and teaching even more? (26)

Curriculum goals, content, and organization thus are seen to form only one set of factors affecting a child's educational life and the ability of the structure of the school, of the educational system, to "teach" just as

forcefully.<sup>2</sup> While recent science and mathematics programs have managed to fit into the existing systems with some ease, Eisner (22) wonders if the humanities and the arts can do so and still retain their integrity. Berman (15) has noted the lack of programs which deal with the humanities in this broader context in the schools, and Wilhelms has summarized much of this dilemma:

If the schools wish to engage themselves in helping young people understand themselves and others and grow a sense of identity, if they want to help each young person face up to the great questions of ethics and values, of life and significance and commitment to purpose, then they are free to do it. If they do it with genuine relevance to life, as their students perceive life, then they will also have learners whose motivation is powerful. Is this what "the humanities" are about? I hope so. I hope that the thousands of unified humanities courses which are springing up around the country—mostly in the twelfth grade—are an intuitive response to the great soul-hungers. But if that is what we mean, it will take strenuous effort and a radical re-thinking to capture it. . . . If the idea behind the humanities is valid, then we have been talking about one of the great streams that run through the whole curriculum. . . . We are free to choose whether to design just one more "subject"—or to go to the hearts of men (42).

Buswell (4) and McDonald (8) have underlined the problem of the need for a perceived compatibility of new concepts in education with contemporary "expert" usages.<sup>3</sup> Huebner (6), reacting to the work of Jacques Ellul and Marshall McLuhan, has suggested that current educational, and particularly curriculum, thought is indeed tied to a technological, instrumental, or end-mean bias which denies man's spirit for specific learnings and technique, his destinies for simple destinations.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> While Eisner is the source for these comments, for a more detailed discussion of the effects of structural organization of schooling, see Grannis' article in 12.

<sup>3</sup> See particularly McDonald's discussions of Thorndike, Dewey, and Tolman; in addition, see Kliebard on Dewey and curriculum in 12.

<sup>4</sup> See also Maxine Greene's reactions to much the same literature, but more especially to R. Buckminster Fuller, in 12.

These writers are concerned not only with changing the context in which learning occurs, but also with redirecting educational goals; and, interestingly enough, they have wide support among scholars in science and technology.<sup>5</sup> Concern with "humanizing" the curriculum and all education has indeed been increasing in recent years, and the discourse ranges from writing on nongraded elementary schools and individually prescribed instruction to pass-fail evaluation and relevant curriculum and attitudes at riot-torn colleges. Yet, these questions also seem to parallel some basic philosophical issues of our time, and that very fear of a loss of the humanities' identity to the human and natural sciences reflects an emerging conflict between a spiritual humanism and a new scientific humanism (or secular materialism?), that finds some voice in the writings of Søren Kierkegaard and Bertrand Russell (or Dwayne Huebner), in the images of 1984 and *Walden Two*, and in many a Sunday sermon.<sup>6</sup>

## Elements of Humanities Curriculum

Ralph Barton Perry (quoted in 21) has described the humanities as those "disciplines which make man more man in the eulogistic sense of the word; which contribute to a good life based on free and enlightened choice among values." This sense of the humanities as "disciplines" is a somewhat recent development. Initially, the humanities involved all inquiry by men about the nature of man, outside of the given dogmas of religions. Only gradually was this breadth of "humanistic" inquiry compartmentalized and formalized into "arts and sciences," or "the seven liberal arts," or, later, "disciplines." Throughout this period the process and content as well as the perspective of the learnings have also been

<sup>5</sup> For example, Cousins, Cozart, and Mesthene in 9, as well as the journal, *Technology and Culture*, published at the University of Chicago. Compare these with the more formalist approach in the journal, *Computers and the Humanities*, published at Queens College, New York City.

<sup>6</sup> The author recently heard Robert Peel, Editorial Counselor of the Christian Science Church of Boston, at Princeton University Chapel, on this subject, April 27, 1969.

changing. The discourse noted above would suggest that our notions of the humanities may perhaps have come full circle. Yet, interestingly enough, the National Council, Endowment, and Foundation for the Humanities is distinct from that for the Arts, and indeed the content of a "liberal" or "general" education still seems to puzzle most educators.

Several authors have wondered about the possibilities of finding a structure of the humanities (Berman in 15 and Jacobs in 35), accepting the fact that the notion of structures is grounded in the language of the "disciplines." This notion, however, has been extended to the psychological and the developmental, as well as to the logical, and these further considerations may provide means for getting at the humanities beyond the formal disciplines so subsumed. The discourse does seem to suggest at least a spectrum of tasks ascribed to learnings labeled "the humanities" through which one might come, nevertheless, to a clearer idea of the problems involved in "teaching the humanities."

At one level, there are the separate subjects, the formal disciplines into which the humanities are divided: philosophy, aesthetics, history, rhetoric and grammar, even psychology and the arts. Frequently the course labels at this level change: witness courses labeled "comparative," "social," etc.; nevertheless, the course is marked by that specialized scholarship to which Howard Mumford Jones was referring (28). Much of the work in the humanities at the secondary level, as Berman has noted (15), has been attempting to bring these formal categories of inquiry from the college level into the public schools, either as separate courses or as topics in a "multi-disciplinary" humanities course. This specialism has been the natural bent of colleges, and particularly of graduate education, although even there some attempt at placing disciplines in broader divisions—humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences—with some courses of broader context, is evident. This too has made its way into some schools at lower levels. The knowledge explosion, however, has been a formidable force against the idea of the "complete gentleman" (6,

16), both in the resulting emphasis on structure and heuristics and in the renewed inquiry into the meaning of a liberal or general education for students not continuing to higher (or to graduate or professional) education. (The colleges have indeed taken over much of these responsibilities, which until recently were those of the high schools in a democracy.)

If the separate subjects suggest the scholasticism and specialization of higher education, or the instrumentalism noted by Huebner (6), they certainly do not fully delineate the full realm of the humanities. There are, perhaps at some different levels, what one may call fields of contemporary wisdom, which are the gleanings of those separate inquiries, the understanding of ethos, the appreciations and perspectives. This is the level of inquiry to which much of the discourse on the role of the humanities refers, and toward which public education endeavors in interdisciplinary approaches to the humanities are often exhorted to direct their attentions. This is that level which deals with the "so what?" questions of man, with the search for meanings and relevancies within and outside seemingly sterile knowledge.

One might suggest yet another level: that of the senses of meaning and of awareness that come not only from outside but through the self. This aspect of the humanities has traditionally been the domain of expression in the arts, but is frequently now associated with sensitivity training, meditation, and self concept (7, 41). It is also reflected (for the crafts) in the philosophy of John Burton (especially on his NET programs, "The Fires of Invention"), in the educational ideas of Rudolf Steiner, or indeed of traditional American Indian education, as well as in the ways of the rugged individualist, idealized in the nature-as-teacher curricula of schools like Prescott College (Arizona) or Life Bound (Colorado) and Outward Bound (Massachusetts). The lack of concern with the inner self in much educational discourse may reflect some behavior and learning theory biases, and it may well also evidence certain cultural biases in perceiving man and his world, particularly distinctions

of mysticism from formal learning, and hence from the schools (although this may be less true of religious schools).<sup>7</sup>

The spectrum suggests (and the author makes no completeness or survey-of-the-field claims for it) that the humanities are involved with basic questions about man and questions of knowing from the mystic to the formalistic, from an almost psychomotor sense of awareness to affective questions of valuing and to the most cognitive understandings of the structure of formal disciplines; and also that further inquiry relating these general fields of activity to senses of "teaching the humanities" is certainly needed. Each of these levels most probably has additional strata, or persistent interconnections. Certainly there are skill elements and appreciations within the separate subjects; some specific knowledge needed at the bases of broader understandings; abstractions about which to contemplate and questions to ask of the universe. Bellack has noted that:

Problems in the world of human affairs do not come neatly labeled. . . . They come as decisions to be made, and force us to call upon all we know and make us wish we knew more. . . . Without adequate understanding of the various fields of knowledge, students had no way of knowing which fields were relevant to problems of concern to them. As a matter of fact, without knowledge of the organized fields, it was difficult for them to ask the kinds of questions that the various disciplines could help them answer (3).

Educators make demands on the humanities at all of these levels, but they most often do not relate these demands to curriculum questions. The humanities are a vast storehouse of various kinds of knowledge, which educators have dealt with only in terms of one compartment. Jordan (15) has suggested that we must better appreciate the developmental aspect of learning in the demands we make on children in the humanities. Nostrand (32) believes that we must more fully understand the process and con-

<sup>7</sup> For an example of a recent parochial school proposal, see 38. For some interesting comments on cultural biases and educational attitudes about man and nature, see Ian McHarg's comments on the NET PBL special, "Multiply and Subdue the Earth," 1969.

tent components of these studies. The compartments we have created by our reference may be a great hindrance. We must be clearer as to our aims, and indeed our means.

## Design and the Humanities Curriculum

Maxine Greene (27) has written that "the problem of education is to make the pupil see the wood by means of the trees." Barring omniscience, the essential questions become those of how much of the wood and by which trees. This is the domain of educational and curriculum design. The significance of design questions in the humanities is underscored in the discourse:

All these theories are characterized by differing principles of curriculum organization and educational philosophy (14).

Philosophers have always argued for the importance of interdisciplinary connections in the study of cultural areas, but seldom have they been successful in getting schools to remove the barriers between subjects (Hood in 15).

How shall our image of ourselves as men be kept intact and instructive while the image is also kept responsive to new forms of knowledge and sensibility that come into our possession? (18)

Yet (he) does not tell us more particularly what sort of discipline or disciplines . . . would be most effective. . . . How are we to use the classics? . . . for unless we can assume that these books will interpret themselves or that the wisdom they contain will somehow be communicated if only they are read, we cannot avoid raising the question of what, if the humanities are to prosper in the future, is the nature of the methods or the arts by which their values are to be realized. . . . All subject matters which we have marked out as humanistic may be studied by different methods—by scientists as well as by humanists—and in being thus studied differently they become in the process different objects (20).

It is quite another task to identify what is worth attending to in the humanities, to justify one's selection of humanistic content, and to conceptualize and describe methods of inquiry and discussion that do not do violence to that content. . . . What constitutes humanistic content and for whom? Are the humanities charac-

terized by their method of production or their method of appreciation; or is their defining character the nature of the ideas they express or the emotions they elicit? (22)

On one level, these questions involve the traditional discussion of organization and patterns of curriculum: core, separate subjects, etc., so well described by Taba (11) and others (2, 9). Yet, they are also concerned with the nature of the learnings toward which education is directed: Do we try to teach the structures of disciplines, or to bring students to one with the infinite through their own faculties? Fox (5) has underlined the relationships between the educational theorist's epistemology, psychology of learning, and curriculum design. The consonance of specific notions of the humanities with epistemological biases should indeed not be surprising. The significance of these biases, and of the general problem of nominalistic-vs.-organismic concerns, has been discussed by Greene and Kliebard (12), and some practical issues have been neatly summarized by Grannis:

A great deal of effort is being expended today to reform the subject offerings of the curriculum, in order to bring them more into line with the disciplines of the sciences and the humanities. It is vital that scholars be concerned with the validity of inquiry in the disciplines but two problems must be recognized. First, the new curriculum is fast being transformed in practice into the same old message in a new form, as it pours vast new quantities of knowledge into the schools for students to accumulate. The notion that there are certain fixed structures of thought to be mastered in order to have knowledge of the disciplines may well gain the upper hand over the sophisticated entreaties of a few that these structures are man-made and that every individual must make choices and develop his own style within a discipline. The key to this problem too may be to think of the disciplines as social institutions. . . . Our second problem stands in the way of all the possibilities we have been considering for the schools. So long as college-bound students, and their teachers, perceive that it is necessary to spend night and day preparing for college, through academic studies, they will be afraid to elect the schools' alternatives, and rightly so (12).

If, then, there is a developmental structure in the humanities, how does or need curriculum design change at the various levels; or, is there some basic structure which one may teach in some way at whatever levels; or, do the humanities not involve cognitive structures of any sort, but rather confrontation and clarification, involvement and excitement, appreciations and valuing (a notion of the humanities one might perhaps trace from Montaigne)? One must ask then not only the nature of humanistic content, but also the nature of the knowledge which we have labeled "the humanities."

Yet, even while inquiring into the nature of the knowledge we are to teach, and into the continuous problems of functional priorities (1, Phenix and Fraser in 10), one must still be concerned with the philosophical bases on which the design is built and with the perspectives which give it direction: with what gives meaning to education, what is worth knowing, for whom, where, and when. Wilhelms (31) has noted that the school curriculum is something we teach for only 2000 days, and that often its side effects are more significant than its direct inputs: what then should we expect from the schools?

Hilton (12) and others have pointed to the changing demands and perspectives of technological or cyber-cultural societies, and particularly to the impacts of generations of well educated peoples, largely liberated from the need to work. Changing social goals and perspectives of self-realization, world relations, and citizenship will find reflection in the curriculum, as well as make for new demands on the content and the context of the humanities. Maxine Greene (12), perhaps reflecting the humanist's distrust or fear of technology, has underlined the need to avoid simple design solutions that do not deal with central human problems, comprehensive designs that restrict more than free, and technical "fixing" or gadget worship that molds men to the means instead of the means to man's goals. Huebner (6) has emphasized a need to design humanistic educational environments rather than to solve particular instructional problems or to achieve only limited technical goals. He has indeed further

suggested the role of the educator as social and political critic:

The content of the school has shifted as the political process has indicated that now one group, now another, needed attention or gained control. When no one else speaks for an important or neglected group or set of values, then the educator must. He must represent none, yet all. To the extent that he takes unjustified sides, he ruins his effectiveness as the educational adjudicator. As dispassionately as the judge in the law court, he must listen to all sides, including the prophets, and seek to build a just educational environment. . . . The study of curriculum can be and should be a great liberal and liberating study, for through it the specialist must come to grips with the great social and intellectual problems of today.<sup>8</sup>

This search for the meaning of education and for the educator's role reflects those same concerns, those same basic conflicts we noted above in the humanities at large. In addition, however, educators must take care not to load their discourse uncritically in favor of the spiritual humanists. Indeed, in their search for definitions of concepts like "education," "teaching," or "indoctrination," educators tend too easily to associate technology (or science) and technical innovations in education with pejorative labels.<sup>9</sup>

The humanities raise peculiar design problems because of the varieties of our notions of the humanities, and because of the task-achievement implications of these notions. If the humanities are conceived as essentially program modes for some interior data processing (35), they may be directed toward symbolic manipulations of patterns of words, numbers, and statements of value, and perhaps to some sort of introspection. If the humanities are conceived as essentially a question of interpersonal relations, something quite different may result. Slaughter and Greene (12) have each stressed the need for

<sup>8</sup> For a somewhat similar position, see Grannis' conclusions in 12.

<sup>9</sup> For some collected examples, see 6, and the journal, *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. I suspect that part of the problem is in separating the process from the people, and that educators do not feel comfortable with explanations of learning which do not include human, active teachers, or with psychological definitions, or with psychologists.

educators to account for what they are doing and to search for objectives around which to mold their activities and their use of technology. Atkins summarized one of the central questions of design quite eloquently:

We came to realize that all of the changes we read about today—whether flexible scheduling, or flexible space, or team-teaching, or ungraded curricula, or multi-age grouping, or multi-media instructional materials—are essentially *ideas*, not set plans or packages, or hardware which can be either "installed" or implemented. The beauty of an idea is that it is pliable; it can be played with, rearranged, restructured, and readjusted to fit one's own situation. What works for us may not work well for someone else in our form, but the same idea in his form very well may. The form is after all not the substance. And the substance we are talking about is of course the nature of the transaction which takes place among pupils, materials, and teachers in the learning process (12).

Thus, one might question with Broudy (17) the relevance and practicality of competence in the formalized humanities, especially in ghetto schools. Or, one might inquire further into the implications of the times and organization of the social institution that is the school: into Grannis' (12) concepts of family, factory, and corporation structural organizations and their styles.<sup>10</sup> Or, one might explore Bellack's (3) concepts of seminars-in-the-round, and the need for somewhat practical, albeit intellectualized, grappling with broad social and cultural problems in a search for awareness of different modes of thought and discrimination in their use.<sup>11</sup>

Future programs in the humanities must come to terms with what the label "the humanities" means for them, and with what is involved in the teaching. These are not easy questions, and no answers are pat. Educators, however, too often adopt new programs or ideas uncritically, and are later dismayed when nothing works, particularly in this age of gimmickry. Indeed, Kliebard has noted that our:

. . . inability to see our field in perspective

<sup>10</sup> See also Eisner (22), cited previously.

<sup>11</sup> Grannis has some similar, and most interesting ideas, in his conclusions in 12.

also results in our tendency to repeat the rallying cries and slogans that had their origins in a different intellectual climate and a different social milieu as if they had an immediacy that they no longer possess (12).

We must not be content to use the luster of new labels to hide old ways, or to make claims we cannot fulfill. We must also come to grips with the implications and relevance of our choices, and should not try to make them *in vacuo*, without some reference. The American educator's love of the eclectic and the functional is some reason for optimism; but his continual patchworking without reference or criticism is also reason enough for concern.

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**NEW**

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