The University, the Student and the Wizard of Oz

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A few weeks ago I sat in my dentist's office turning the pages of a business magazine. An advertisement caught my attention, because it yelled out in bold print that the accumulated knowledge of the world is doubling every four years. One of the results of this information explosion is that it forces college students to ask with greater urgency how they can make sense of the world they live in, since what they learn about that world is so quickly buried under new knowledge. How does a student avoid the feeling of defeat when he must accept the situation that he knows or will know very little in the face of all there is to know?

Because we have accumulated more knowledge than can be assimilated by any one student, the student gains more control of his experience when he becomes conscious that he must choose the body of knowledge he studies. The reason why we select some facts as worth knowing is as important as the facts themselves. We bestow meaning on things as we describe their relationships to one another and, therefore, the facts do not have meaning in themselves. The student must view data in a broad context, not by itself, to take advantage of the wide spectrum of possible relationships. No thing has meaning except in relation to other things. And in spite of the argument that the self knows only its own existence, man finds meaning for his behavior in viewing his relationships with other man. Joseph Fletcher, a contemporary religious thinker, has put it this way, "An I is an I in relationship with a you; a you is a you capable of becoming an I, in relation to a me."
This consciousness of what it means to be a human in a human environment shapes the selective process by which we organize our experience. Social scientists today accept the psychologist, Joseph Royce's assertion that man's brain is the only brain which is aware of itself. This consciousness is emphasized by Victor Frankl, a psychotherapist, when he describes such awareness by calling it doubt. "More than such faculties as power of speech, conceptual thinking, or walking erect, this doubting the significance of his own experience is what sets man apart from animal."2 Doubting the significance of his existence, man must ask questions and make choices to find meaning in his life. Having become aware that a given of the human condition is to make decisions, that is, to select and to organize, the student in a course treating human behavior should see himself as a participant and not merely as an observer. Through research we may add to our store of facts, but the selection and ordering that we make are even more important for society and the student.

I think one of my colleagues, Ken MacRorie, has stated it accurately. "Today you are forming what will tomorrow be your past experiences, and you have some choice in what you do today."3

Most of us find ourselves trying to impose order and, therefore, meaning on the multiplicity of impressions and facts which surround us each day. Finding fuller meaning demands seeing man as greater than the sum of his parts, viewing him holistically and giving meaning to his acts and thoughts in the human context. As Frankl puts it, "... we can discover certain aspects of reality by extracting them from the massive flow of what is."4 Now to do what he suggests, I must be aware of the values I use in selecting certain aspects of reality.

For me the job of the teacher and the student striving to achieve a valid educational experience includes each of the following perspectives: (1) to view man holistically, (2) to relate man to his human context, (3) to acknowledge the value of being aware as an essential to greater understanding, (4) to recognize that man chooses what he will be aware of, which forces him to be an active participant in his experience and not a bystander.

What classroom situation will stimulate both teacher and students to achieve successful understanding of these four perspectives? It would be silly to assume that every classroom experience is a valid educational one. There aren't enough vital teachers or enough students who enjoy total involvement and seek maximum awareness. But let's imagine that these two parties find each other and produce the situation where teacher and student stimulate each other's consciousness. Such a situation is governed by the ultimate concerns, the reasons for being of the teacher and the student. Two students in the Social Bases of Human Behavior course caught the spirit of what I am describing, when they reacted to the course in evaluating it. One said, "It is very interesting and gives one a good background for the situa-
tions that one will have to encounter in life." The other, even more convinced, explained, "The course has opened my mind to many opinions, theories, and objects of reality that I was unaware of before. This course has been more than memorization and feedback—it is a course to provoke a 'thinking' response." By their responses, these students have proven the correctness of Joseph Royce's statement. "... as a man participates in the daily business of living within the context of his ultimate concerns, those concerns which recur from generation to generation, those concerns which, in other words, convey deep meaning and creativity for man, will be retained and regarded as valid."5

Since a valid educational experience is one that deals with the ultimate concerns of the individual, what are the questions of ultimate concern which must be asked? First, I would suggest that most people want to answer the question "who am I?" This, of course, cannot be answered unless you deal with what it means to be human among other humans. Therefore, how man became man must be discussed. This involves using facts from many disciplines: biology, history, anthropology, archaeology, to name only a few. The student might then go on to question how he learned to be human and how symbolic behavior affects interacting with others. I believe that no single discipline can freely deal with these questions. General Education cannot give total answers either, but it treats phenomena from more than one narrow perspective. Being less fragmented by procedures and skills than any one discipline, General Education is able to more freely offer answers which consider the human bases of human behavior.

While specialists in chemistry, physiology, or anthropology and sociology may provide part of the answer, each contributes less than the fullest answer. The best answer is the one which makes use of information from those areas which in combination give a more complete explanation of what we perceive, which is the best estimate of the nature of things, . . . or finite reality in contrast to ultimate reality which is the final essence of all things. (Royce) A holistic view includes more of the best estimate of things and comes closer to describing and understanding the essence of all things.

Ortega Y Gasset, in his History as a System, criticized naturalist reason because it is not inclusive enough as an explanation. In doing so he exposes the dismay of many generalists as they view the narrowness of the specialist's approach.

When naturalist reason studies man it seeks, in consistence with itself, to reveal his nature. It observes that man has a body, which is a thing, and hastens to submit it to physics; and since this body is also an organism, it hands it over to biology. It observes further that in man as in animals, there functions a certain mechanism incorporeally, confusedly attached to the body, the psychic mechanism, which is also a thing and entrusts
its study to psychology, a natural science. But the fact is that all naturalist studies on man's body and soul put together have not been of the slightest use in throwing light on any of our most strictly human feelings, on what each individual calls his own life, that life which intermingling with others, forms societies, that in turn persisting, make up human destiny.

The broader General Education approach frees us to select among a larger number of possible relationships, which can bring increased possibilities of "deep meaning and creativity" for the student. Henry David Thoreau was, in this way, a successful student. He went to the woods to locate and analyze the source of his values, to simplify. This meant learning about the complex relationships between his five senses and what he observed and felt from outside, not just specializing in the temperature of Walden Pond.

If, like Thoreau, a man once learns to be aware of, or to perceive his relationships with the world around him, he is well on the way to knowing both who he is and how his world is which gives him meaning. Marshall McLuhan, the controversial contemporary observer of media, supports the generalist with this statement, "It is . . . by seeing one set of relations through another that we store and amplify experiences." General Education offers a way of viewing through which we can seek out more relationships, thus avoiding a narrow point of view.

The holistic approach leads to a simple but vital fact: all knowledge that man gains in whatever area and by whatever means is human knowledge produced to satisfy human needs, immediately and ultimately.

Those of us who in teaching rely on content must constantly remind ourselves that the scientific abstractions are meaningless unless they are brought to life by being taught in terms of human uses or their value as human expression. The study of social institutions or political theory is most meaningful when it leads to realizations of how the daily life of people is changed, because they interact within the patterns of an institution. What does it mean to people that they must alter the tempo of their activities or must learn new ways of behaving such as one sees in Race Relations and Civil Rights today? And perhaps more important to the student is what does it do to his life when he becomes a member of an academic community. I am sure that the students at Berkeley found out about political practice, and by implication political theory, when they protested against harsh administrative practices. Too much teaching is done without regard for the possible personal impact of the course content. And too much learning is done without consideration of the possible use to which the facts can be put and without figuring out how a facts fits in with previous knowledge. Fletcher recognizes that both teachers and students should
avoid being like “Tic-Toc in the Wizard of Oz, the mechanical man [who] had the special grace of always doing ‘what he was wound up to do’, but who lack[ed] freedom to choose.”8

Every student has this choice. He will fail to see opportunities for choice if he uses only facts to pass tests. He begins to see potential choices, if he uses facts to increase his conscious awareness. He risks his self-assurance because there is more than a joke in saying, “Don’t confuse me with the facts; my mind is already made up.” As his awareness increases, he will realize that having a choice is choosing to live with ambiguity and tentativeness. Therefore, the student must learn that most answers to the important questions are at best tentative.

Since what is is always changing, I believe that Jacob Bronowski’s statement that “we ought to behave in such a way that what is can be verified to be so”9 means that there are only tentative answers about the human situation and not absolute ones. For as soon as the student has “the answer” he has chosen to lock himself in perpetually; he has developed a closure as intellectually blinding as if someone had taken his sight from him.

In a McCall’s interview, Eric Fromm stated that knowledge is nothing but seeing. He wasn’t talking directly about education but what he says applies to my understanding of the learning process. Fromm stated:

What it really means to be aware . . . is to see the full reality of another person and myself. That is to say, to see that which is hidden. Knowledge is nothing but seeing. Most people have an idea that knowledge is information. If I go to the university, if I go to a lecture, if I read, then I have knowledge. That’s not knowledge!10

The student who reads a book or takes a course and gets only facts from it, which he can regurgitate, and isn’t aware that he should relate facts, might just as well read the telephone book or the Sears, Roebuck catalogue. What then is knowledge? “Knowledge” Fromm continues, “is what I acquire by penetrating actively through a surface (note that this implies that one must participate and make choices) and seeing something to which I was blind before, which I did not see before.”11

What the student becomes aware of in any given educational situation cannot be described definitely; however, since man is the only animal with potential self-awareness, as Royce suggested earlier, he ought to become aware of himself and the world he lives in, in order to become more fully human. Ortega Y Gasset’s succinct summary is “I am myself plus my circumstances.” I am convinced what many students want is to find the unity that exists between themselves and their environment or circumstance. Fromm’s version is:
There are only a certain number of ascertainable ways in which man can solve the problem of existence. As an animal, man wants to live; but as a human, he wants to find unity. He wants to overcome a sense of complete separation. He wants to be one with something.\textsuperscript{12}

That means \textit{seeing} relationships. Bronowski has asserted that what the scientist and the artist seek is the unity present in variety. I would further suggest that what many students want is to discover unity in the variety of facts they are asked to assimilate, but most importantly, want to gain an awareness which touches their deepest concerns in trying to understand themselves and their environment.

And as I observe their desires, it is not wholly a matter of learning facts, but of learning ways of viewing facts and seeing relationships. I am not suggesting that a teacher do his students' seeing. But most adults have learned that awareness progresses geometrically; the more you are aware of, the more you can potentially become aware of. And teachers ought to pass this attitude on, showing the student how to develop the richness of life. Royce's definition in \textit{The Encapsulated Man}, of the criterion of knowledge, that "(man) accepts as true that which enhances man's existence, or rejects as false that which diminishes his being,"\textsuperscript{13} is useful because what enhances or enriches the student's life is being in harmony with what \textit{is}, not what he thinks he is.

I have been talking about the benefit of awareness independent of the final ingredient of the valid educational experience . . . choice. In life, choice cannot be separated from awareness. Fromm's earlier comment about actively penetrating through a surface, implies that one of these basic choices for the student is whether to participate in the process of becoming aware or not. As the life flow goes through us in the mixture of time, place, and event, each one of us has a choice about what he actuates and what he condemns to nothingness. Perhaps the student who chooses not to actuate or stimulate his consciousness in an educational situation ought not to be in college. However, the teacher who fails to offer the student the information (which hopefully will register on his consciousness) that he is making a choice about the narrowness of his world has not begun to fulfill his function as a teacher.

The teacher who demonstrates that choice is inevitable in the human situation and helps each student realize his responsibility to choose what he becomes, is doing an inestimable service for his students. Having become aware of this choice, the student learns that he has more control over what he sees, what he does, and how he interprets.

I do not assume that making someone aware presumes the absence of facts; I do assume the interrelation between facts. I do not want to
see teaching or learning as a process move any further in the direction described by Marshall McLuhan, who believes that "... specialist learning in higher education proceeds by ignoring interrelationships; for such complex awareness slows down the achieving of expertness."14

FOOTNOTES


4 Victor Frankl, *op. cit.*, p. 36.


8 Joseph Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 139.


