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Book Review

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BOOK REVIEW

Eleanor Buelke

Schlosser, Courtney D.

The Person in Education

New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976. Pp. xiii + 413.

To live means to have courage and to remain strong in the face of adversity and suffering, as well as to have the illusion of complete happiness. Remaining a person when things are bad is not easy; but it may be the truest test of character in that it means being willing to rise above what threatens to reduce one's self to an object or an abstraction. There is no easy way to learn how to become a person except through living, and that means suffering and enjoying, despairing and hoping, hating and loving, and taking one's stand upon the conviction that we are always something more than any of the feelings, threats, or forces of existence that tend to reduce us to the status of objects and things.

In this volume, the author-editor challenges, questions, and deplors many of the "stereotypical, socially acceptable, role-playing modes of behavior, thinking and feeling" currently appearing in schools and colleges, modes which restrict the sense of experience that is required for growth as a person. At the same time, he supports, suggests, and explores ways in which teachers and students, staff and administrators, may "transcend their merely socialized selves and relate honestly, openly, and authentically to one another." This anthology is a humanistic approach to focusing attention upon the *person* in education. The claim that there needs to be a close relationship between educational thought and practice and humanism is supported by vital, significant developments in human knowledge and experience. In recent years, such knowledge has advanced through research and study in varied disciplines, and by appearance of many problem-solving groups among minority and, heretofore, excluded/deprived segments of the world's population. For many, the awareness and experience of themselves as autonomous persons is a new and exuberant feeling.

The concept of *person*, viewed by Schlosser, provides an intellectual and philosophical frame of reference from which to inspect and project a uniquely humanistic way of perceiving learners and education. In Part I of the book, writers of the past and present contribute to the understanding of this concept from historical, philosophical, psychological, and sociological vantages. Part II focuses upon educational contexts: implications for humanistic change. Here, Schlosser has chosen writings which take into account two important functions of teaching; he refers to these functions as *transmissive* and *transformative*. The first assumes that the teacher has

something to transmit to the student, promoting an active teacher-passive student relationship. The second assumes that both student and teacher are active in the learning process, resulting in mutually significant changes and growth as persons.

The section dealing with historical foundations helps to increase awareness that humanism has deep, historical roots, that most solutions to life's problems are neither final, nor ultimate, and that reaching for ideal being and experience is a life-long quest. The section on philosophical foundations attempts to uncover the essential meanings of existence as they may contribute to enlivening and deepening the daily tasks of teaching and learning. As these readings center on the significance and nature of pragmatism, idealism, realism and existentialism, they build understanding and appreciation of humanistic education. Concern for the identity of the individual and its effect upon human potentiality functioning in the here-and-now is emphasized in the section on psychological foundations. Rationale for modern theories of education grounded in the acknowledgement of close, *interdependent* linking of healthy ego and mind with reality and experiences of the body is related, and reiterated. Exploration/education in these areas might well be what one writer here calls "the challenge and promise of our lifetime." On the sociological level, "freedom" of the individual, in any measure, remains viable only as long as the individual, the personal self, exercises some action and thought of his own in actual encounters with his world. The whole person who educates, and comes to be educated, takes his/her individuality in part from his/her history, biological and genetic; in part from his/her philosophy of Being, a definition of the meaning of existence; in part from his/her concept of self, living inwardly and outwardly; and in part from his/her surrounding social environment. To this end, education needs to be actively "co-intentional" and cooperative, rather than prescriptive, passively dialectic, and personally dehumanizing. It must be viewed as a "continuous and interactive process, engaging both student and teacher alike as persons."

In practice, then, humanistic education calls for commitment to the importance of *caring* and *trust* in the interpersonal relationships that occur in the classroom. Education in human relations is the core of humanistic education, and should begin at the teacher-education level, with major emphasis in this area. Teacher educators, themselves, must exemplify humanistic teaching. Prospective teachers, from the beginning of their college education to its end, need to be involved in a continuous, integrative seminar, focusing on "personal development in terms of ideas, beliefs, and attitudes." Ideas and information invigorate and vitalize only insofar as they "animate and enrich the ordinary course of life." A humanistic curriculum takes into consideration the basic biological nature of the child and how the child grows. Vital and personal experiences of the learner and processes by which they are derived and lived become the curriculum. One writer suggests that the humanist in curriculum design ought to "free himself from the bureaucratic school and from the sorting function which it performs for the status system."

At the present time, some dimly discernible changes in favor of more humanistic teaching and learning are being made in the well-established, middle class system of public education. Flexible scheduling, independent study, work-study programs, individualized learning, certain values-clarification techniques, inclusion of almost all aspects of human activity in curriculum planning and discussion—all of these are indicative of movement toward cherishing the *persons* in the classroom. In “A Personal Note” at the conclusion of this book, the author states that, although there is hardly a mass movement toward radical reform in the schools, still he has optimistic, good feelings for the future of mankind. In order to fulfill their responsibilities deeply and meaningfully, those persons engaged in educating other persons must do all that they can “to know and to encounter personal freedom and the love of life” for themselves. Perhaps, then, they can join Schlosser in a poem he has written to a group of his students:

. You gave to me the experience
of being alive with you
and knowing and encountering
the spirit within us
and between us

So, to each of you
I want to say thank you,
thank you for allowing me
to see into your lives
and to experience what
only those whom you love
experience and know.

I shall not forget you
since you have shown me
who you are, in such a short time,
nor can I be the less
for it