

JAMES B. MACDONALD
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF
EDUCATION, AND DIRECTOR OF
RESEARCH AND SCHOOL
EXPERIMENTATION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN,
MILWAUKEE

“HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF HUMAN POTENTIALITIES”

“The necessity to find ever-new solutions for contradictions in his existences, to find ever-higher forms of unity with nature, his fellowmen and himself, is the source of all psychic forces which motivate man, of all his passions, affects and anxieties.”¹

The development of human potentiality emerges in the context of biological growth and maturation, the context of socialization processes, and context of personal responsiveness. A great deal has been said concerning the effects of the biological and socialization forces upon development. Were these forces all that account for human potentiality, however, we would have limited possibilities. The limits would be readily known to us

¹ Fromm, Erich, “The Sane Society”, Reinhart and Co., Inc. 1955, p. 25

through examination of biological limitations and social forces in the framework of a given culture, with only the combining and recombining of circumstances and forces accounting for variability.

Now this view is held explicitly by some (especially stimulus-response psychologists) and implicitly by others. The strength of this position lies in empirical validation of what data it can control. Its weakness lies in its present failure to explain evolution of human society through creative activity, or the more vital phenomenological aspects of experience.

There is much in human development, both historically and in the life cycle of an individual, that is at present unpredictable in terms of growth patterns and socialization processes. Many scholars in this field feel that this is due to the lack of knowledge available to us at this stage in our understanding. They have confidence that as more and more empirical data become available to us, the pieces will begin to form a predictable pattern.

This may, perhaps, be the case but there is another way of proceeding at this point in our understanding of human nature which recognizes an essentially unpredictable element in human development as part of the basic potentiality of the human — a creative actualizing and unpredictable phenomena, and it is with reference to these unpredictable aspects of development that the concept of human potentialities become most challenging.

The process of human development is considered here to be a process of becoming.² As such it is poorly described by analogy as an unfolding of an organism along predetermined paths. It is, rather, a process whereby the person is always in a transactional relationship with his environment. This relationship includes individually unique choices and the vagaries of unpredictable circumstances; as well as the mechanisms of growth and predominant socialization processes of a society. Development is, in other words — a creative self-actualizing,³ unpredictable

2 See Allport, Gordon "Becoming" Yale University Press, Inc. 1955

3 See Maslon "Creativity and Culture," edited by H. H. Anderson

phenomena, as well as a predictable pattern of growth and socialization.

The essence of development eludes the viewer unless the realm of personal responsiveness is considered as foremost in the appraisal of developmental processes. Or, to put it another way, growth, maturation and socialization are much more useful for understanding similarities than they are for the consideration of differences. Thus, when viewing the socialization process, we may readily see how language becomes a part of the child's development; how self-concepts emerge, etc. What is the dimension of personal responsiveness to the socialization process. So, too, in the biological realm. The forces of maturation explain much about walking, sexual maturation, etc., but little about personal responsiveness to these developments.

What this means is illustrated when we view man historically and individually. Rather than ask the question "How could man have come so far, developed such high technology and social life?," we are more prone to ask: "Why has man failed so miserably in ridding the world of war, disease, famine, starvation?" Or, rather than marveling at individual man and asking "How could an Einstein be?," we may ask "Why are there so few great men?" It is because the answers must lie in the realm of what man and society does to the element of personal responsiveness that the questions are phrased differently. We are, in other words, not concerned here with how man can and has conditioned himself to his present state, but with how this very conditioning process has affected the creative, self actualizing, personal aspect of his development.

The basic propositions underlying this approach are then: That man has a personal, self-actualizing and creative capability not limited purely by biology or conditioning; that this area of personal responsiveness is the avenue through which individuals stretch and may reach their potentialities; and that a view of human development which wishes to focus upon human potentialities must center upon the developmental aspects of personal responsiveness.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

"We maintain, therefore, that personality is governed not only by impact of stimuli upon a slender endowment of drives common to the species. Its process of becoming is governed, as well, by a disposition to realize its possibilities, i.e. to become characteristically human at all stages of development. And one of the capacities most urgent is individuation, the formation of individual style of life that is self-aware, self-critical, and self-enhancing."

and

"Hence the individuality of man extends infinitely beyond the puny individuality of plants and animals, who are primarily or exclusively creatures of tropism or instinct. Immense horizons for individuality open when billions of cortical cells are added to the neural equipment of lower species. Man talks, laughs, feels bored, develops a culture, prays, has a foreknowledge of death, studies theology, and strives for the improvement of his own personality. The infinitude of resulting patterns is plainly not found in creatures of instinct. For this reason we should exercise great caution when we extrapolate the assumptions, methods and concepts of natural and biological science to our subject matter. In particular, we should refuse to carry over the indifference of other sciences to the problem of individuality."⁴

The individual life cycle is a process of becoming characterized by the individuality and uniqueness of the human being. Not each becoming a man in a generic sense, but each becoming a human individual with myriad potentialities not known or predictable in any absolute sense.

Just as a historical view of man may be seen as purposeful in facing what Lindner has called a "trial of limitations",⁵ with the goal of overcoming them; the life cycle view of man also has its purposefulness. This purpose may be seen as Buber⁶ views

⁴ Allport, *op. cit.*, p. 22

⁵ Lindner, Robert "Prescription for Rebellion."

⁶ Buber, Martin "Between Man and Man", Beacon Press, Boston, 1955.

it in relatedness, or as Tillich⁷ in the freedom from anxieties. Fromm⁸ calls this goal productivity; and Lindner⁹ calls it productive rebellion.

Whatever purposefulness we choose, throughout all these concepts runs the thread of freedom and individuality, whether for individual maturities' sake or as the basis for some form of higher relatedness. Whatever its terminal status, it is as Maslow says, "a self-actualizing process"; and it is unique to circumstances and heredity of the given individual.

The development of an individual is an extremely complex and perplexing matter. Theories abound and organizing schema vary from Freudian phases¹⁰ to Developmental Tasks,¹¹ or Gesell's normative behaviors.¹²

I should like to set forth a schema for my discussion, a simple set of educational doctrines drawn from the psychoanalytic literature of neo-Freudians and predominantly from the work of Schactel.¹³ I shall not attempt to deal with developmental specifics, nor trace a longitudinal pattern. Rather, I shall discuss a basic process which is operative at all times in the *perception*, *affect* and *thinking* that is involved in all human behavior.

This process makes most sense to me when put into the context of three sets of conditions for the development of the maximum of human potential. These conditions suggested by the work of Harley Shands,¹⁴ are as follows:

7 Tillich, Paul "The Courage To be" Yale University Press, Inc., 1952.

8 Fromm, Erich "Man for Himself" Reinhart and Co., Inc. 1952.

9 Lindner, op. cit.

10 Erikson, Eric "Childhood and Society" Yale University Press 1955.

11 Havighurst, Robert "Developmental Tasks and Education" Longmans, Green & Co., N. Y., 1952.

12 Gesell, A and Ilg., F. "The Child from Five to Ten" Harper & Brothers, N. Y., 1946.

13 Many of the ideas expressed here are taken from Ernest Schactel's "Metamorphosis", Basic Books, Inc. N. Y., 1959.

14 This idea was suggested by the work of Harley Shands, "Thinking and Psychotherapy", Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1960.

The A Priori Conditions

A priori conditions are genetic and physical in character. An individual must possess an adequate genetic structure to develop humanness, must experience normal (for him) physical growth, and must have proper nutritional care throughout. The lack of any or all of these conditions will result in the thwarting of the development of human potential. These conditions are important and are necessary before human potentiality may develop. They are "givens" which are necessary but not specifically human in nature.

The understanding of physical growth, nutrition and genetic lack or physiological damage is essential for providing the background of the development of human potential. It is considered here to be the necessary condition for developing potential and will be assumed to exist in further discussion.

The Social Conditions

Human beings develop and are distinctly recognizable as such in the context of social relationships which involve the use of signs and symbols, the most apparent being language. Societies and/or cultures provide frameworks for the development of human beings. They teach the individual how to act, how to symbolize and conceptualize, and how to perceive himself and his environment.

In order to become minimally human, an individual must learn to interact with others and must operate through the prevalent symbolic system; and in the process learn to "see" himself and his world as others see him. His basic quest is toward the mastery of "common" understandings about status and roles, objects and ideas, himself and others.

The manner by which the individual is "socialized" is also of great importance. The degree of understanding, love, acceptance, recognition, hostility, aggression, for example will have deep consequences upon his personality formation. So, the content of his world and the process which he encounters will be set by his particular social conditions.

Social conditions are minimal conditions. They provide a framework by which the individual becomes human. They are,

however, essentially *closed* in nature. No matter what the nature of a specific culture may be, the individual is closed in its symbolic universe and world view; its customs and mores; its functions and objects.

Thus, the basic problem of developing human potentiality appears. In order to be human, one must experience the closure of the socialization process. One must be taught what it is appropriate to be curious about; what things exist and what they are called; how one manipulates these objects of attention symbolically and physically; how to maintain one's personal integration in this culture (often via defense mechanisms); and, how to interact with and percibe others. Yet to develop potentialities I would posit, one must be open, and it is openness which provides the maximal conditions for human development.

The Maximal Conditions

To be open to life is the maximal condition for developing human potential. To be open in thought — fluent, flexible and original; or open in affect — experiencing the potential feelings in an activity; or open in perception — seeing the potential stimuli in the world... these are the ways to maximum development of human potential.

Given this perspective, the development of the individual involves a process of becoming, self-actualizing, or developing potentialities. The individual's struggle is difficult, fraught with barriers and bounded by culture, biology, and social agents. The basic mode of determination of the quality of personal responsiveness to existence is the affective mode. Man's experience is colored, directed and channeled by his affective response to life. Our recognitions and perceptions are, in a very real sense, at the service of our affect. Thus we must look toward the affective response of the individual to determine the quality of his responsiveness.

As Schactel¹⁵ says —

"I believe that we have in these two kinds of affect, which

¹⁵ Schactel, *op. cit.*

can be observed from the beginning of extra uterine life, the prototypes of two types of emotion which are destined to play a role throughout man's life. Their quality, relative strength, and relative frequency are important in the formation and functioning of the individual personality. The decisive difference between these two types of affect is that one is characterized by helpless distress (embeddedness-affect), and the other by active coping with a drive tension or by active relating to the environment. (activity-affect). They represent two different ways of dealing with the separation from the intra-uterine situation of continuous supply and shelter. One implies basically the wish for the return to this stage or the frustration, anger, impatience that such a return is not possible; the other represents the adaptation to the new, separate form of existence. In reality, we find in every person a mixture of these two types of affect, although one of them may appear relatively pure on one occasion, the other on another.¹⁶

The individual's emotions are tied to these two basic affective modes. Emotions aroused produce an embeddedness or activity. Embeddedness-affect, it shall be argued here, short circuits the becoming of the individual, and activity-affect fosters becoming; and the process of becoming is the creative realization and development of human potentiality. Thus, as one looks at developmental behaviors as they are received by the world and fed back to the child, one looks for the existence of embeddedness-affect or activity-affect. When embeddedness-affect exists, one may assume that potentiality is incapsulated and when activity-affect exists, one may look for the enrichment and unfolding of capability.

Embeddedness-affect is the feeling of boredom which is akin to the knowledge of the meaninglessness of one's activity for self becoming. It is anxiety which arises from the threat or of actual separation from a state of embeddedness. It may be pleasure when pleasure is essentially a need satisfaction which incorporates the object "pleasured" into the embeddedness of the subject. It may be experienced as hope when hope is mere wishful expectation that somehow everything will change for the

16 Ibid, p. 29

better, or joy with the quality of magical fulfillment which suddenly changes the whole character of life and of the world. Whatever its form, it remains the emotional vehicle by which the organism maintains a state of quiescent affective equilibrium in relation to environment. When clothed in negative emotions (boredom, anxiety, etc.) it is symptomatic and when dressed in positive terms (joy, hope, etc.) it is a chest masquerading as fulfillment.

Activity-affect on the other hand is feeling arising from a direct encounter with the world. It is openness and responsiveness to the impact of the world not sheltered by an embeddedness in some other context, but rather a direct transaction. It is stimulation and activity, involvement, and the pleasure of contact with objects "cut there." The encounter with reality is the significant aspect of activity affect, not the incorporation of reality in a system of equilibrium. It is joy not linked to any expectation but as a felt experience of acts of relatedness. And, it is realistic hope, founded in satisfactions based in the encounter with reality along the way toward goals.

On the levels of thought and perception, these basic affective orientations to the world guide the behavior of the individual. When embeddedness-affect is dominant one "sees" what is needed to reinforce this affect, and when activity-affect is dominant, one "sees" what is in reality to be perceived. The individual's thoughts are bound to the structuring of cognitions to enhance the basic affective orientation. One thinks what one needs to think to preserve equilibrium (e.g. "rationalization"), or one thinks what one can grasp as he faces reality.

Human development, thus, may be viewed as a biological given with its environmental and social conditioning, and its personal responsiveness in the form of affective orientation to the world. It is this last which seals the biological and social forces and processes in embeddedness, or which utilizes the bio-social avenues for greater realization of human potentiality. It is the contrast between an end product and a never-ending product. A contrast between a closed system which "sees" and "thinks" what it has learned to see and think in its attempt to maintain

an adjusted equilibrium; and an open system which reaches outward and inward in active search, discovery, and creativeness in its encounter with reality. It is the contrast between an individual for whom reality is the defined and internalized feelings, symbols and thoughts learned in the culturally or biologically embedded affect, rather than that reality is what is *becoming* in the creative transaction between a person and his interactions in the world "out there" and "in here."

The activity-affect oriented individual is the "creative" man mentioned by Thomas and Znaniecki¹⁷, "Not the "Philistinian"; the closed, structured, adjusted man; nor the "Bohemian," the open non-integrated man; for both "Philistines and Bohemians" are "frozen" by their affect-embeddedness in autistic or social responses. Rather, the creative man as an integrated, searching, seeking individual getting beyond the boundaries of autism and society by the opening up of affect in reality.

If it is this openness, this activity-affected that will open the doors of human potentiality, then the implications of this for schools and teachers are agents in the developmental process which will need to be explored.

"The Schools and the Development of Human Potentiality."

The development of the individual in society is affected by five major social forces: the home, the school, the peer group, the communication media: and adult contacts outside these realms (stores, police, etc.) The relative impact of the school is debatable under these circumstances. It is assumed here that the school is of central importance to development.

However, the school has not been credited with a major influence upon development up to this time because it has functioned as a reinforcer of the embeddedness-affect brought from the home. In other words, the school has and does affect development in outwardly small ways, not because its potential for

17 Thomas, W. I. and Znaniecki, Florian. "Three Types of Personality from the Polish Peasant in Europe and America, represented in Theories of Society, edited by Talcott Parsons, Free Press, Glencoe, Ill. 1961.

shaping development is small but precisely because its basic format of operation is essentially that of the home and society, i. e., the development of embeddedness-affect. The hope of the school lies in the breaking of this basic pattern which may allow individuals to restructure and resist this orientation.

The basic developmental format found in all these forces, including the school, is the imposition of authority in the context of *right* and *wrong* and *good* or *bad*, rather in the context of *appropriate* or *inappropriate*. The essential difference between the perception of an act, idea, or feeling as right or wrong, good or bad rather than appropriate or inappropriate rests in the closing of alternatives in the developmental process; in the stultification of individual judgement and choice. The feeling of inappropriateness in contrast provides a qualification which allows the door to remain open for other circumstances. It poses the question of "what is appropriate *now*?" without the finality or absoluteness what is "good" and "right."

It should be apparent that the crucial aspect of this distinction does not rest in the surface behavior of stopping a given inappropriate behavior, or by the exercise of authority as an adult responsible for children. The crucial dimension lies in the affective environment created during over-activity.

We may, in other words, "teach" our youngsters to be "good" and "right" so that they learn to see themselves in these terms; have feelings of shame, guilt, and anxiety when "bad" or "wrong." The "badness" and "wrongness" encapsulate the developing individual in an affect-embeddedness which becomes a powerful drive for equilibrium, for returning to the security of what is "good" and "right."

What we must "teach" our youngsters is to act, feel, and think "appropriately" in those situations which call for it, by focusing them upon the search for appropriate behavior in a wide variety of circumstances. Here what is learned is "that I cannot act, think, or feel this way in these circumstances, but I *can* act, think, and feel this way."

It is important to stress the essential difference between "right-wrong", "good-bad", and "appropriate-inappropriate",

for in our set of thinking it is easy to shift the black and white quality of one to the intended meaning of the other. Appropriate behavior, regardless of its action context is behavior which is the possession of one's own. It has the element of self-acceptance of discovered usefulness rather than the stamp of an authority beyond the boundaries of one's self. Appropriate behavior, then, is in essence self-disciplined behavior; and more: it is behavior at the service of the individual, not behavior which serves something or someone beyond the individual.

The act of recognizing the word "cat" may be any of these things. At a purely cognitive judgemental level, it is "right", "good", and "appropriate". But in terms of the affective dimension, it cannot be all things. At this level, the affective, it becomes "I am a *good* person because I recognize "cat"; or "I am *right* in the eyes of authority when I see "cat"; or "when I see "cat" it helps me to understand my world appropriately."

The affective impact of "good-bad" and "right-wrong" built throughout the curriculum reinforces previous embeddedness-affect in youngsters. Learning becomes an affect-embedded necessity to maintain balance by escaping shame, guilt, and anxiety. For those incapable of academic learning, embeddedness at a non-school level is reinforced and is seen by such behavior as "withdrawal, aggression, illness and phantasy. The school in other words facilitates the social or autistic embeddedness of the developmental process.

The child may grow large (biologically) in school, will learn well (perform academically), and act sociably (get along with others) without the schools contributing a great deal to the development of human potentiality in the development process. The school can lay claim to the effects upon performance which would not have come without it. But it is, developmentally, a "penny wise-pound foolish" procedure which reinforces embeddedness-affect. We may, in other words, be developing adequate role players at the cost of adequate development. For as Fromm¹⁸ says:

18 Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 124

"It is the fact that man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished "thing", dependent on powers outside of himself unto whom he has projected his living substance."

— The Potentiality Oriented School —

The potentiality oriented school is not child-centered, nor society-centered, nor subject-matter centered. It is *reality-centered*, (as defined earlier). By this, it is simply meant that the school does not exist primarily to inculcate our cultural heritage, nor principally to develop role players for society, nor primarily to meet the needs and interests of the children. It exists to bring children in contact with reality, of which our society, ourselves, and our cultural heritage are parts.

The basic goals of the reality-centered school are to meet the unmet needs of children (to free them); to develop thinking and values; and to encourage creative response to reality. Embodied in these goals is the awareness that children must be free to explore; must have symbolic tools for exploration; and must focus upon culturally and socially defined concepts or focus as points of orientation for exploration, but not necessarily as end products.

In the reality-centered school, nothing exists only to be mastered and imitated, but primarily to be discovered and invented. Reality and man's symbolic glasses for viewing it stretch to infinity. Symbolic forms are utilized to meet all of reality. To catch a bird in the net of a child's focus is to perceive something to be classified, examined, counted, described, observed, rhythmically felt, poetically known, and otherwise related to one's own personal meanings. For there's certainly as much music in a bird as there are feathers to count, as much rhythm in the reality of a bird as there are behaviors to observe.

The basic methodology of the reality-oriented school is simple. It is based upon the proposition that all children are self-actualizing, and that curiosity is basic to this process. Children's activity is characterized by such things as seeking, searching, discovering, inventing, trying, exploring, researching experimenting, etc. Teacher behavior encourages this by stimulating, guiding, clarifying, helping, supporting, etc.

The reality centered school is an "open" school. Learning is seen as the outcome of personal responsiveness to wide varieties of stimulation and wide usages of symbolic media. Children are seen as unities, self-actualizers, and creators. The function of the school is to challenge and stimulate the child's creative encounter with reality. Social relationships are seen as objects for stimulation and creativeness, and the communication process is characterized by attending to the stimuli of objects themselves without mediation, and responding directly and creatively.

Contrast this with the "closed" school. Here learning outcomes are *synonomous* with performance. Learning is described as conditioning and/or reinforcement; problem solving (with predetermined answer), remembering, and recognizing, are honored processes. The children are organisms, or role players, or types. They are manipulanda and consumers of school goods. The function of the school is life adjustment, or occupational preparation, or cultural indoctrination, literacy, or citizenship. Social relationships are primarily bases of confirmation, sanction, and motivation; and communication is a process of attending to predetermined stimuli with the production of predictable responses. Everything is, in a sense outside reality inasmuch as it is closed to any reality but that already "captured."

Evaluation in the "closed" school focuses upon performance as an end product. Teacher judgement is used to compare performance to standards developed by others, and grades are given. The whole process is future oriented and categorical. It is for the use of persons other than the student. In a reality-centered school however, evaluation would be of two types. The individual progress would be seen through the feelings of individual worth and productiveness, satisfaction and gratification felt by the children under the guidance of the staff. The program evaluation would be in terms of the degree of involvement, vitality, enthusiasm, and productive work (thinking and valuing) which existed. The key to evaluation would be the quality of *living* in the school environment, not the quality of learning (as performance); for the reality-centered school would recognize

that *living is learning* and the *quality of living is the quality of learning*.

SUMMARY

The emergence of human potentialities depends upon the maximizing of the possibility in the developmental process of activity-affect rather than embeddedness in biological or socialization processes. The individual who realizes greater potentiality for himself is neither autistically oriented nor symbolically structured to the exclusion of new reality. He is, in a word, integrated, with the ability to open himself and to be open to reality. The processes by which we develop are less a determinant of human potential than the personal responsiveness to these forces. All development rests in a framework of self and others, power and authority, known and unknown. The essence of realizing human potential lies in the freeing of affect to be attached to activity, rather than the encapsulating of this affect and the resultant structuring of percept and thought for the purposes of maintaining an embedded equilibrium.

The school can play an important part in the development of human potentiality when it is realized that its present effectiveness in the developmental process is negligible because it reinforces the embeddedness of the home authority-affect with its own form of authority-affect. When schools begin to open the horizons of children, and prize the activity-affect of youngsters, then great strides may be possible in realizing the school's potential role in the developmental process, and for the child's realization of his potentiality.

To do this, it is suggested, schools must focus upon meeting unmet needs, or the development of thinking and valuing, and the encouragement of creative response to reality. "School" must mean a vital, lived, involved, stimulating experience where children seek, search, experiment, discover and live. The schools must, in other words, move away from partial emphasis upon child, subject matter, or social centeredness and move toward activity-centeredness.