

## CHAPTER I

### A NEW VISION -- A NEW WAY

Without vision of our destiny, we flounder.

From such vision proceeds a sense of what is important; from import, interest develops and perspective emerges. Without both perspective and interest, productive, unified action is not possible. As Whitehead has pointed out, when a sense of importance or interest wanes, "experience trivializes and verges towards nothingness;" perspective vanishes (Whitehead, 1968, p. 68). Perspective is essential because it creates a "gradation of relevance;" it is the means by which we come to attach value to some things and not others. Differentiating issues and concerns into an order of priority clears the way for action.

But action can be good, detrimental or just a waste of time. And when an entire nation or society tries to mobilize itself to act on behalf of young children and unborn generations, vast numbers of people will be involved. But the productivity of their involvement will be dependent upon the degree to which they can be unified around programs of action which can be tested out for their viability. Our dilemma within the profession of education is no different from the dilemma facing the society at large and ultimately it cannot be dealt with separately. Julian Huxley (1960, p. 88) says:

I would go so far as to say that the lack of a common frame of reference, the absence of any unifying set of concepts or principles, is now, if not the world's major disease, at least its most serious symptom.

What is needed, according to Huxley (1960, p. 50), are noetic integrators<sup>1</sup> -- "symbolic or conceptual constructions which serve to interpret large fields of reality, to transform experience into attitude and unify factual knowledge in belief."

Early childhood education as a professional concern has not yet generated its "noetic integrator". Consequently, efforts to provide children with equal educational opportunity of high quality have resulted in a wide variety of programs many of which are based on very limited aspects of psychological theory and large numbers of which have no theoretical basis at all. Resources have been "sprinkled" around rather than being canalized into one or two promising comprehensive programs which could be subjected to rigorous testing and evaluation prior to wide-spread implementation. The latter approach, while not very popular because it is politically inexpedient, is a more systematic and promising one. It is an approach that ultimately will have to be taken because the other is both costly and unworkable.

The comprehensive early education system proposed here is based upon a broad but clear conceptual framework which may stand as a first step in providing a noetic integrator for the field of education generally and early childhood education in particular.

The power of a "noetic integrator" to perform its unifying function is dependent upon the degree to which it extracts and preserves from the

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<sup>1</sup>Huxley borrows the term "noosphere" or "noetic system" from Teilhard de Chardin. It means the totality of man and all of his thoughts, feelings, and activities.

past those elements of experience which will keep us in close touch with reality while creating an awareness of potentialities for development in the future. The past is rich; but not all of its elements are equally promising as a basis on which to build the future. A noetic integrator provides criteria by which one may select from the richness of the past those things that are most important for living in the present and planning for the future. This function is more indispensable today than ever before. The future is spilling into the present with such rapidity that without a means of integrating the past with expectations for the future we can suffer from "future shock" and become immobilized (Toffler, 1971). We must either develop an integrator for the profession or continue to endure what is no longer very endurable, namely, the pouring of vast resources into inadequately conceived, poorly staffed, and not very successful educational programs for our children.

Developing such an integrator depends on knowledge of the past as well as vision of the future. If we don't know where we've been, it's hard for us to determine where we're going. Rootlessness in the past means no growing into the future and a perpetual living entirely in the present -- reacting rather than initiating action, responding on the basis of impulse and hedonistic inclinations. Avoiding what is painful and holding on to familiar pleasures only works for the short run. Those with a truncated sense of future have no long-range goals. They are subject to the manipulation of external

forces because they have no reason to resist pressures or to persevere.

When these kinds of conditions prevail without<sup>in</sup> a profession, we can expect a flurry of hastily conceived innovations in response to crisis or strongly felt needs. The importance of innovation for its own sake will be exaggerated. The inevitable consequence for both children and teachers is fragmentation of experience as short-lived innovations are tried out one after another. Most of the educational innovations of the past decade have no solid roots in the past, do not serve a vision of the future, and therefore evaporate into insignificance after having consumed valuable resources.

Unfortunately, too many educators have come to believe that innovation is something that represents a clean break from the past and can be quickly developed. Most significant innovations do not share those characteristics. For example, technological innovations such as air travel, telecommunications, or industrial uses of atomic energy took years and years to develop and perfect. The kind of innovation we require in early education must represent a positive evolutionary thrust that draws out of the past what will serve present needs and our sense of the future. The new vision and the new way that we propose for early education can only be fully understood within an historical context that sheds some light on how we got where we are and where we should go from here. It is essential that this context be clearly understood, for innovations whose rootedness in the past is not apprehended will be misunderstood,

superficially applied, and therefore have an extremely low probability of competing successfully with traditional systems. Instead, a "comprehensive" innovation" -- a new way generated out of a new vision -- must blend tradition with a sense of destiny and place us in charge of the future.

#### From the Past to the Present

Educators have assumed psychology to be the younger first cousin of education and that such bonds of kinship would inspire a cooperative and productive compatibility. There are some evidences of compatibility between the two, but they are only on the surface. Deep down there is a fundamental cleavage. Modern psychology, particularly that fostered in the United States, drew heavily from a scientific tradition that dealt with material things rather than living beings. Thus the selection of a scientific tradition determined psychology's view of man rather than psychology having generated a view of man based upon man's own experience of living -- the history of his own evolution -- and the ideals reflected in his art, religion, and scientific achievement. In other words, a view of man presented by modern western psychology is a mechanistic, atomistic view rather than an organismic, holistic view. As we shall see, the former view by itself is inadequate as a philosophical base on which to build an educational system to serve the needs of growing children.

To gain its independence from philosophy, psychology had to find an empirical basis for setting up its own household. Its

declaration of independence occurred at a time when Newtonian physics dominated scientific thought. It was therefore not unreasonable, and perhaps even inevitable, that psychology, in studying man's mind and behavior, should have adopted the methods of the physical sciences. Consequently, the emergence of the human sciences was sustained by a constant transfusion of methods, concepts, and assumptions about the nature of things from the physical sciences, the metaphysics of which rested on the laws of mechanism. These laws were then assumed to be applicable to a living organism. Needless to say, something of a force fit was required to translate mechanistic conceptions into their psychological equivalents. Ultimately, it led psychologists to believe that elementary sensations, reflexes, and conditioned responses can explain the entire nature of man and that freedom, dignity, sense of purpose, aspiration, will, and creativity are all illusions and have no place in a science of man (Skinner, 1971).<sup>1</sup>

However, educators have intuitively sensed that this kind of scientific metaphysic, mechanistic and atomistic, ~~is~~ is not compatible with what they know from experience about growing human beings. Furthermore, they have repeatedly faced its unworkability when adopted wholesale as the basis for an entire educational system. In higher

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<sup>1</sup>See Chomsky, Noam. The Case Against B. F. Skinner, The New York Review of Literature. December 30, 1971, for a critical review of Skinner's book, Beyond Freedom and Dignity.

education, an increasing awareness of this incompatibility between psychology and education has led to a separation of psychology departments from schools of education.

Thus the history of psychology can be seen as a succession of borrowings from the physical sciences -- borrowings which have necessarily distorted any view of man because the scientific materialism out of which it grew did not deal with organismic phenomena. Even psychologists have been sensitive to the alien philosophical parentage of their profession and have tried to incorporate a number of different philosophical streams of thought into their work. While clinical and humanistic psychology have explored other philosophical bases, one aspect of the profession, behavioral or experimental psychology, still remains more or less in the tradition of scientific materialism.<sup>1</sup> If, as Whitehead claims, the aim of philosophy is disclosure of the reality of things, it follows that a philosophy of mechanism cannot be adopted to disclose fully the realities of the organism we call man.

This is not to say that modern experimental psychology has been useless and that what it has discovered has no applications to education. Rather, the weight of our thesis is that a human science based primarily on a mechanistic conception of man will prove woefully inadequate to the task of integrating what we know about human beings in a way that would generate a theory broad enough to explicate the dynamics of human

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<sup>1</sup>Both Dewey and James were prominent psychologists who were not locked into the mechanistic tradition. They represent notable exceptions to the general trend.

growth and serve as a basis for developing a pedagogical theory more promising than what we now have.

While this historical sketch is not a detailed explanation of how we got where we are, it gives us enough of a perspective on the past to understand the need for new philosophical premises if we are to build a new educational system.

### The Philosophy of Organism

While the past has its uses for contemporary life, it may also dim the light of ideals or purpose and maintain too tight a grip on the present. For a time that grip may be experienced as a welcome security; ultimately it is suppression that leads to pathology. A growing and vigorous civilization is sustained by a sense of high purpose in the lives of its citizens. Its progress is represented by a materialization of that purpose. Our civilization, on the contrary, seems to be vitiated by a purposeless materialism. When purpose goes, there is a dilution of meaning and a disintegration of social values. Standards become eroded, feelings become gross, and the structure of the moral order collapses. The individual caught up in this trend will, having lost his sense of purpose, find himself out of touch with his own reality and therefore self-alienated. Such a condition of self-alienation is well-nigh intolerable and will motivate either a search for a higher purpose or lead to a variety of escapes -- withdrawal into a fantasy world and ultimately mental illness, alcoholism, or drug addiction. Persons who tend to be more extroverted may respond to the frustration and anxiety from such self-alienation by striking out against society and breaking the law. Mental hospitals and prisons represent two major



institutions designed to take care of those human beings who withdraw or strike out and are no longer able to assume any social responsibility. The problem of irresponsibility has reached such proportions in our society that William Glasser (1965) in his treatise on reality therapy asserted that the teaching of responsibility is the most important educational task facing us. But being responsible presumes integrity and it is difficult to conceive of integrity without considering the notion of purpose and the way it creates collective wholeness on the social level and a subjective wholeness on a personal level.

In examining the transformation of man through various ages, Lewis Mumford (1962, pp. 168-169) observed:

Neither the loose subjective wholeness achieved by primitive man nor, at the other extreme, the accurate, piecemeal objectivity now sought by science could do justice to every dimension of human experience. If the first was limited by its caprices, which recognized no external order or causality, the latter is equally limited by its compulsions, which recognize no inner flow of purpose and make no account of free creativity or potential divinity . . . the ideal of wholeness itself is what has been lacking in the culture of man: His specialities and particularities have gotten the better of him.

The "piecemeal objectivity" which has characterized psychological research has found its parallel in the piecemeal approach of educational programming for young children. We turn to a philosophy of organism for a noetic integrator -- a new vision and a new way -- one that can pull the pieces together because it speaks to the nature of man and accounts for the phenomenon of purpose and its peculiar power to produce

the wholeness of which Mumford speaks.<sup>1</sup>

The feature which distinguishes man as organism from man as mechanism is creativity guided by conscious subjective aim and expressed through the capacity to know and the capacity to love. We define these capacities broadly enough to make them useful and applicable to all living creatures, but in man they reach their most complex and highest forms.<sup>2</sup> To know and to love constitutes the basic powers and purpose of man. They are also the means by which potentiality is further created and extended. The capacity of man to create potential beyond himself is an inherent characteristic that places him above all other created things. We agree with Huxley (1960, p. 14):

One thing is certain, that the well-developed, well-integrated personality is the highest product of evolution, the fullest realization we know of in the universe.

Any educational system for the future must entertain that vision of man as the peak of creation yet still capable of a never-ending "creative advance into novelty." We redefine education as the process of translating potentiality into actuality while creating further potentiality. It is the continual creation of potentiality on the one hand and a perpetual

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<sup>1</sup>We have found the organismic philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead as put forth in his cosmology, Process and Reality, to be a basic resource for the development of the basis of the philosophy. It is beyond the scope of this book to present a detailed account of Whitehead's philosophy as it relates to every detail of the new educational system being presented here.

<sup>2</sup>In Chapter III, knowing as a differentiating power and loving as an integrating power are more fully discussed.

actualization of potentiality on the other which gives man the character of immanence and transcendence. Immanence is reflected in the ability to mold out of the past a dynamic present; transcendence is using the present to extract from the past what will enable one to move beyond himself into the future. It is a basic ontological principle of the philosophy of organism that a being in the present is created out of its own past as it incorporates new data from the environment; everything emerges out of something which exists previously. Thus, each man at any given point in time is a summation of his past. The contrast between this "summated" past and the experience of the immediate present in anticipation of a future determined by some subjective aim creates consciousness. By virtue of our consciousness we are impelled to relate ourselves to all other things in the universe including unknown things or the potentialities of things. The qualities of immanence and transcendence reflected in consciousness and self-awareness make man a spiritual creation. We therefore submit that a new vision and a new way must be predicated upon an acceptance of the spiritual nature of man.

To some, such an affirmation may seem inappropriately religious; to others it may seem ethereal, impractical, and therefore of no consequence. It should be clear, however, that we are using the word "spiritual" in a completely non-denominational religious sense to express the qualities of immanence and transcendence -- qualities which enable man to take a firm hand in shaping his own destiny; qualities which enable him to escape

from the limitations of materiality and make him different from all other species of living creatures. The implications of assuming the spiritual nature of man for education constitute the subject of the rest of this treatise.

An examination of one basic implication at this juncture may be helpful to one whose immediate response may be to deny the usefulness or practicality of such an assumption. Personal identity always includes a combination of what one has been and what he potentially might become. Any educational system or teacher not able to relate to the "potentiality aspect" of identity will, in effect, not be accepting or working with the whole child. It is difficult for a child to learn from someone who cannot fully accept him, especially if in that reservation lies hidden a rejection of potentiality because of preconceived notions about the child expressed in terms of limitations. A teacher who accepts the spiritual nature of man as we have defined it, will view each child as an open-ended question -- a creature of unlimited potentiality who can never be classified as uneducable. The very atmosphere of an educational system staffed by teachers who consciously or unconsciously deny the spiritual nature of man is likely to be suppressive of growth and development.

Much of what we are remains always in potentia, including the capacity to create future potential. To understand that assertion is of critical importance for its implications, translated into educational practice, collectively constitute a comprehensive renewal of education

as we know it now. The most obvious implication is that we have no justification for placing a limit on what we as teachers may become or what a child may become.

A concrete example of how potential is created may be useful here. Every child has a "given" potentiality for learning a language. In fact, there is no known case of any child failing to learn a language under normal circumstances. Once a language is learned, the potentiality for reading is created. Once a child knows how to read, a veritable infinity of potentialities ~~are~~<sup>is</sup> created -- potentialities for sampling the thinking and records of experiences of vast numbers of other human beings. The ability to read, in fact, enables one to incorporate the experience of the lives of literally thousands of other human beings into one's own experience. That, in turn, creates further potentialities so vast in scope that the mind is staggered in trying to grasp its ultimate significance.

It must also be borne in mind that some kinds of experiences may be assimilated by the organism in ways that preclude the creation or extension of potentiality and which therefore function as suppressors of further growth and development. We have many instances where the potentiality for reading is suppressed by inappropriate teaching. This may be particularly true when the native tongue of the child is different from that of the teacher. The Anisa Model<sup>1</sup> is designed to provide those

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<sup>1</sup>Anisa is the name of a new early educational system or model being developed at the Center for the Study of Human Potential, University of Massachusetts. Please see Preface for additional information.

experiences that actualize given potentialities in ways that continually and actively create further potential. It also provides a conceptual means for identifying suppressive experiences that should be avoided.

Examination of one implication of this principle for educational practice will help to make the point clear. It has been well established that for many children standardized tests or other kinds of examination in the formal learning situation function as a suppressant of potentiality. This happens primarily because the teacher and the educational system have not adopted a view of man which accepts his latent potentialities as a fundamental aspect of his reality. Without even realizing it, they may not be fully committed to finding the most appropriate means of facilitating the actualization of those potentialities. Thus the score on a standardized test will typically be interpreted as a statement about the actual limitations of the child rather than as an indicator of what kinds of experiences are needed next in order to actualize and extend potentiality. Such an interpretation of the purpose of testing leads to action which will function as a suppressant of potentiality because it generates an attitude about "failure" which causes the child to withdraw rather than to set out on the adventure of self-creation. Seen from the point of view of organismic philosophy, testing should be an experience welcomed by everyone since it helps to reveal how the past experiences of the organism may or may not have prepared it to pursue a subjective aim or purpose within the constraints of present circumstances and resources. The organismic approach means that all testing is made to facilitate rather than suppress the release of potential.

Learning and the Process of Becoming

What is the nature of the transition from potentiality to actuality? That is the critical question always before a serious educator. We have derived from the philosophy underlying the Anisa Model a coherent body of theory about the nature of that transition from which testable hypotheses might be generated. During the years to come, these hypotheses will be tested out and modifications introduced into the model thereby making its own self-renewal congruent with the essential conception of the nature of man.

Essential to an understanding of this transition from potentiality to actuality is the idea of process. Whitehead presents the thesis that the reality of something is the process whereby it translates potentiality into actuality. When that process stops, being stops. It, therefore, follows that we feel most "real" when we are relatively unimpaired in the process of becoming what we potentially might be. The quality of the process is a measure of our wholeness, our mental and physical health, a measure of our joy, and a reflection of those basic capacities of knowing and loving which perpetually lure us into the creative advance which is the process of becoming. Educators of very young children, then, must see themselves as facilitators of process (as well as disseminators of factual information) and they must know what that means in terms of guiding experience and preparing environments.

Apart from genetically determined maturational processes, learning is the agency through which potentiality becomes actualized. The rate and

quality of actualization thus depends upon learning competence. How to learn is itself something that is acquired through learning, but it is rarely taught in school directly. The more the child knows about how to learn, the more rapidly he translates potentiality into actuality thereby creating further potentiality. The Anisa Model centers around the concept of learning competence as the key factor in the release of potentialities which reflect the spiritual reality of man.

Failure to achieve competence as a learner will be subjectively experienced as a kind of perishing. Ordinarily the sensation of perishing is intolerable and may lead to a wide variety of escaping behaviors which in turn may be more suppressive of the release of human potential. More often than not, teachers will respond to such behaviors with some kind of discipline, which may or may not support the educational process. The sense of perishing may also be experienced as a depletion of feeling -- an anesthesia or growing insensitivity -- what Thoreau would have called an "atrophy of sensibility". A person in a condition of atrophied sensibility requires violence to make himself feel alive. Herbert Reed (1967, p. 21) describes such a person as a:

. . . dull-eyed and listless automaton whose one desire is for violence in one form or another -- violent action, violent sounds, distractions of any kind that can penetrate to its deadened nerves. Its preferred distractions are: the sports stadium, the pin-table alleys, the dance-hall, the passive "viewing" of crime, farce and sadism on the television screen, gambling and drug addiction.



He makes a further observation: "the same forces that have destroyed the mystery of holiness have destroyed the mystery of beauty." It is to the spiritual nature of man that the mystery of holiness refers. Any successful educational system of the future must deal with those forces which destroy that mystery -- the limitless potentialities of knowing and loving. We are witnessing such destructive forces at work today reflected in a "will to ugliness". The "mystery of beauty" fades away when a student fails to regard his own potentialities as a sacred trust. Regarding it as anything less than that represents a betrayal which destroys the mystery of holiness (wholeness) and with that goes the beauty of the human being.<sup>1</sup>

The function of education is to draw out potentialities. This depends upon students developing an inner acceptance of their own potentialities as a trust interfused with their ultimate concerns and sense of ~~teaching~~ <sup>destiny</sup>. The role of teachers is to help prepare environments and to guide the interaction with that environment so that the development of learning competence -- mastery of the process of translating potentiality into actuality -- may be guaranteed and that sacred trust honored.

The processes of development arising out of interaction with the environment are patterned; they are more or less sequential. Timing is important. Translation of this new vision into a new way rests upon having a knowledge of the process of development and its timing, a concern to which we now turn our attention.

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<sup>1</sup>The dynamics of motivation created in an individual who develops that sense of sacred trust in regard to his own potentialities is a critical feature of the Anisa Model. It is discussed in greater detail in Chapter V under the aspect of potentiality concerning spirituality.