

Abraham Maslow

Introduction

Abraham Maslow, known as Abe to his ardent followers, is one of the original founders of the *self-esteem* movement. Along with Carl Rogers and William Coulson, Maslow helped change educational thought to this day, some say, for the better. However, Dr. Coulson, who, together with Carl Rogers pioneered the practice of "encounter groups" (Values Clarification, Decision-Making, & "Critical" Thinking), is now touring the country asking forgiveness for the failed policies he and his peers injected into public policy.

Change of Mind

Many do not realize – *nor is it taught* – that Abraham Maslow himself was repentant of his own theories. In fact, in one of his attempts to critique his theory, he made it clear that his theories should **never** be used on children. He even went so far as to say that "self-actualization" should "very definitely" not be used on children (preface to his posthumous edition of his seminal work, Motivation and Personality). He was in the process of writing a full rebuttal of his previous theory but died before doing so. Some of his thinking was, however, published in an article of dissent entitled "*Humanistic Education vs. Professional Education: Further Reflections*," which was not published until 1979, nine years after his death (found in the Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Summer, 1979).

An Interview

When a reporter spent months visiting a Los Angeles public high school, he received this reply from a boy described as "*the smartest student in the class*":

"I learned that in the Vietnam War, North and South Korea fought against each other, and then there was a truce at the 38th parallel, and that Eisenhower had something to do with it."

(The Reporter then asked): "Would it bother you to know that the things you learned were wrong?"

(The student responded): "Not really. Because what we really learned from Miss Silver was that we were worth listening to, that we could express ourselves and that an adult would listen, even if we were wrong. That's why Miss Silver will always be our favorite teacher. She made us feel like we mattered, like we were important." (See below.)

The teacher herself saw her role in very similar terms:

"I want to be real in class and be a human.... And I want my students to know that they can be themselves and I'll still listen to them. I want every one of them to have a chance to express himself or herself. Those are my priorities." (Ben Stein, "*Ben Stein's High School Diary*," Los Angeles, December 1986, p.178).

Neither the teacher nor this school is unique. This recent movement has urged teachers to be non-judgmental, to "*humanize*" the classroom, to raise the "*self-esteem*" of students. A leading writer in this matter was Carl Rogers, who spoke of "*helping students to prize themselves, to build their confidence and self-esteem*," of "*teachers who are real persons*" and who "*humanize their classrooms*." It was falsely assumed that intellectual development would follow this process. Unfortunately, in many tests, Maslow and Coulson saw failure after failure. This failure led the reporter in the story above to observe that the students he saw, "*know little in the way of organized thought processes or even basic ways of*

solving intellectual problems.” While the reporter noted the “*sincerity of intensity*” of the teachers, he nevertheless concluded [and rightly so]: “*A human being who has not been taught to think clearly is a danger in a free society.*”

Danger?

Why would this person be a danger? In an article about one of William Coulson’s – remember, he and Carl Rogers together edited many of the books that influenced this thinking – speeches, we find out the negative effects of this theory (taken from an on-line article):

The majority of these kinds of activity are based on the “non-directive” therapies of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, who admitted to problems with their use on children. Children are encouraged to adopt “values” for themselves — even if different from those of their parents — and to try making their own decisions on matters of life and death — that there are no “right” or “wrong” decisions, just “different” ones — with inadequate knowledge of consequences.

Studies have shown that children undergoing the above types of courses under the rubric of drug- or sex-education tended to be more experimental than students who received no training at all. Dr. William Coulson, a colleague of Maslow & Rogers, has been criss-crossing the nation apologizing to the American people for that period of psychological work, and explaining why it is harmful to children:

Decision-Making: Some of the procedures lead children to believe they can use a 5-step “decision-making” process to make their own decisions on matters of life and death, e.g., whether or not to “experiment.” (Or maybe whether or not to shoot at schoolmates, or abandon an unwanted fetus.) Step Two is, “State the problem.” Step two is, “Examine the alternatives.” “For the child who has been taught abstention,” Dr. Coulson says, “the word ‘alternatives’ leaps off the page like a flaming sword! What’s the alternative to abstention?”

The Magic Circle: When the chairs are placed in a circle and the teacher steps outside, students are encouraged to exchange innermost thoughts about sex, drugs, lying, cheating, masturbation, etc. In such situations the extremes of peer personalities begin to interact: At one end of the scale is the naive, dutiful, obedient child; at the other, the aggressive, assertive, experimental child. Coulson rhetorically asks, “In such settings, which child is the more likely to influence the other? The system is psychologically designed to bring down the dutiful, obedient child.”

~ See Appendix 1a ~

Ego-Strength

The basic idea of self-esteem, or what Maslow and Rogers call “*ego-strength*,” in America education is that students should be told how wonderful and important they are by teachers and through exercises in the curriculum that have the students (or teachers) saying or writing all kinds of positive things about themselves. In California, a task force was established to introduce self-esteem education into the curriculum at all grade levels and in many different subject materials. Those who worked on and developed this material believed that low self-esteem was a major-cause of everything from drug use to teenage pregnancy to low reading and math scores to discipline problems and high drop out rates. Proposals to raise self-esteem involved giving rewards, prizes, etc., to all students regardless of performance. Self-esteem was not linked to performance since this would raise the possibility of failure, or inadequate performance, which would (according to the theory) perpetuate low self-esteem.

The Evidence

Whatever self-esteem is taken to mean, no reliable evidence supports the utility of self-esteem scores to predict important behaviors (see Susan Black, “Self-Esteem: Sense and Nonsense,” *American School Board Journal* 178 [July 1991]: 27-29; and, Black, “Research Says...,” *American School Board Journal* 179 [March 1992]: 26-28).

A 1989 study of math skills compared students in eight different countries (A. LaPointe, N. A. Mead, and G. Philips, *A World of Difference: an International Assessment of Mathematics and Science* [Princeton, NJ: Educational Teaching Service, 1989], p.10). American Students ranked lowest in mathematical competence, and Korean students ranked highest. But the researchers also asked students to rate how good they were at mathematics before the comparison. The Americans ranked highest in self-judged mathematical ability, while the Koreans ranked the lowest. Mathematical self-esteem had an inverse relation to mathematical accomplishment! This is certainly an example of a “feel-good” psychology keeping students from an accurate perception of reality. Obviously self-esteem doesn’t always negatively affect a person, but evidence shows it has no adverse, concrete, relationship to behavior.

Self-Actualization

As for Maslow’s well-known concept of “self-actualization,” the relatively few studies that have investigated this notion have been far from supportive. For example, Maslow makes much of his assumption that self-actualized people are high in creativity. A test of this by Mathes (E. W. Mathes, “Self-Actualization, Metavalues, and Creativity,” *Psychological Reports* 43 [1978]: 215-22), however, found no evidence for this basic Maslovian assumption. Maslow also predicted that the self-actualized would tend to be physically strong, especially fit people. A study made to verify this prediction could find no support for it (R. M. Ryckman, M. A. Robbins, B. Thornton, J. A. Gold, and R. H. Kuehnel, “Physical? Self-Efficacy and Actualization,” *Journal of Research in Personality* 19 [1985]: 288-98). Other **major** difficulties with Maslow bear on his hierarchy of needs (see for example: Richard M. Ryckman, *Theories of Personality*, 4th ed. [Pacific Grove, Ca.: Brooks / Cole, 1989], p. 362). Another problem with self-actualization is that Maslow, at the end of his life, very clearly stated that self-actualization is found **only** in adults. He specifically said that the concept has no sensible application to children, and that even college students [young-adults] are poor representatives of self-actualization. ~ See Appendix 1b ~

What About Me?

Most new school policies are tried first in the inner-city public schools. And as a child growing up in Detroit, I got my fair share of Values-Clarification based in Maslovian and Rogerian philosophies – where all of us students got into a circle and discussed who we would let into a bomb-shelter and who we would have to leave out. The discussions entailed us sharing our thoughts about how this would make us feel, how these decisions differ from what our parents teach us, etc.. A lot of what Dr. Coulson spoke of (in “Danger?”) I have “experienced.” And this theory has caused turmoil in my decision making ever since! As well as a long road in dealing and coming to grips with my thought process.

18-Months

For the last eighteen-months of his life, Maslow knew without a doubt that the therapeutic classroom never should have been tried; he deplored the harm done to children (Coulson, Maslow 1989. To Johnson, Mark L., M. D. *Research Council on Ethno-psychology* [June 17]. La Jolla, Ca.). He believed the young deserve to be protected. Yet he saw children subjected to group programs that he claimed less than one percent of adults can survive without a very great fall (Coulson, W. R. 1988. To Wolpert, John: page 1. *United States International University* [May 12]. San Diego).

From his vantage viewpoint as designer of humanistic psychology in the clinic (and classroom), he could see *what* made education fail in the classroom – not foot-dragging school boards or conservative parents but the **faulty concept** behind the programs.

The Three R's

Too many teachers today feel that they can be a catalyst to prepare their students for the “*real*” world, rather than simply passing on hard knowledge. What’s lacking is the essentials of arithmetic, reading, and writing, as well as history. What is taught today is basically psychology in disguise. More and more teachers are finding they are taking psychology courses as part of their training to become a teacher.

Goals 2000 – promising us that our students would be number one in science and math by the year 2000 – was passed to try to curb the decline in education, however, it has failed miserably. Why? It is mainly due to, I have concluded, the underlying educational philosophy and the lack of time spent on the *basics* and more attention on “*decision-making*” and “*critical thinking.*” *Goals 2000* turned out to be nothing but outcome based education repackaged. Its primary focus is on the outcomes of the students:

- Exhibit personal adaptability to change.
- Accept the responsibility for preserving the earth for future generations.
- Realistically assess personal strengths and weaknesses.
- Appreciate racial, ethnic, religious, and political differences.
- Function effectively in a multicultural environment.
- Exhibit positive self-concept and a sense of self-worth.
- Process skills over knowledge, among them: problem solving, decision-making, accountability, teamwork no competitiveness).

The above has nothing to do with learning math, science, English, history, reading and writing. With class time taken up by multi-culturalism, environmentalism, decision-making (values-clarification), show and tell, special forums, class trips, learning about *alternative* lifestyles, sex-education, coping skills, death and dying, conflict resolution, drug-awareness programs, etc., etc., little time is left for the actual knowledge to be imparted from teacher to student. However, more time is allowed for the social-engineering theories of modern educational philosophy. Dr. Chester M. Pierce, Harvard University, in his keynote address to the Association for Childhood Education International (at Denver, Colorado, April 1972) said that,

“...every child in America entering school at age five is insane because he comes to school with certain allegiances toward our founding Fathers, toward his parents, toward a belief in a supernatural being, toward the sovereignty of this nation as a separate entity.... It’s up to you to make all these sick children well.”

Note that he didn’t say that the teachers should teach their students math, writing, reading, geography, and the like. Dr. Pierce is advancing an engineering program to change the outcome of these students, socially. This is the goal of almost all modern humanists, of whom Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and William Coulson were themselves. In fact, Carl Rogers, in 1964, won the Humanist of the Year award, and Maslow in 1967 [Eric Fromm won it the year prior to Maslow].

Propaganda

John Dunphy, writing in an official humanist publication, The *Humanist* magazine, wrote about conveying “*humanist values*”:

“I am convinced that the battleground for humankind’s future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith; a religion of humanity that recognizes and respects the spark of what theologians call divinity in every human being. These teachers must embody the same selfless dedication as the most rabid fundamentalist preacher, for they will be ministers of another sort, utilizing a classroom instead of a pulpit to convey **humanist values** in whatever subjects they teach regardless of the educational level – preschool daycare or large state university. The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new...”

The battle is merely about who’s philosophy will be taught. And the current philosophy that gained popularity from the 1930’s and gained control of the classroom in the 1960’s has itself proven to be the catalyst for many of our educational and social ills. The psychology of Fromm, Maslow, Rogers, and Coulson have infused themselves with currant theories of “*how to*” teach. This is a dangerous proposition to accept, and, to teach to any child. And, ironically enough, Dr. Carl Rogers did not practice nondirectiveness with his own children and grandchildren.

Appendix

The research cited below is merely one small example of a rising mountain of evidence that stands against the modern version of *selfism*. Man's faddish theories come and go leaving in their destructive wake the lives of countless innocents.

1a) In the January 97 issue of SBC LIFE, p. 12, there is an article entitled, “*Self-Esteem Movement Seen as the Culprit: The Doctor Says, ‘We Were Wrong.’*” In this article, the author says:

“Psychologist William Coulson helped found the movement to emphasize ‘self-esteem’ as a path to school success. Today, he travels the country confessing, ‘I take responsibility. I was part of this approach which has taken over our education system. **We [Coulson, Maslow and Roger] were wrong.**”

“. . . What explains this turnabout? Partly, **new research debunking the notion that boosting a child's image of himself brings greater competence**. For instance, a recent, exhaustive review of different classroom techniques known as ‘Project Follow-Through’ tracked 7,000 children at 139 sites across the country and discovered that **the educational models focusing on self-esteem ‘resulted in lower academic scores than any other model evaluated.’**”

“. . . Leading researchers of self-esteem like Morris Rosenberg, Thomas Moeller, and Alfie Kohn **now conclude that self-esteem does little or nothing to enhance success. More darkly, pushing the concept may actually bring new problems.**”

“A 1996 study in Psychological Review, the Journal of the American Psychological Association, indicates **that an artificial emphasis on self-regard can actually increase violence** and other anti-social behavior. ‘. . . , violence appears to be most commonly a result of threatened

egotism - that is, highly favorable views of the self that are disrupted by some person or circumstance.”

1b) Dr. Robyn Dawes, Acting Department Head, Dept. of Social and Decision Sciences, Carnegie Mellon University, winner of the APA William James Award in 1990, in his book *House of Cards: Psychology and Psychotherapy Built on Myth*, 1994, published by The Free Press says:

“We also know that the credentials and experience of the psychotherapists are unrelated to patient outcomes, based on well over five hundred scientific studies of psychotherapy outcome.” (p. 38)

“Psychotherapy, has often been categorized a medical procedure, but as we have seen, it lacks the scientific grounding that characterizes modern medicine.” (p. 133)

“Professionals in psychology and psychotherapy clearly benefit from a New Age psychology - it brings them clients. Unfortunately, they in turn contribute to and reinforce that psychology the ‘professionals’ ‘view’ as become highly compatible with the new Age view. In particular, that very egoism . . . has come to be viewed as a necessary component of ‘mental health.’ . . . **they are highly influenced by cultural beliefs and fads: currently, the obsession with ‘me.’ . . . In particular, a view that feelings and self-esteem ‘cause’ certain problems, in the absence of evidence.**” (p. 250)

Bibliography – (* Books that I highly recommend / → Books that one must have)

* *Hidden Danger: Disclosure Based on Ideas of W. R. Coulson*, by Pearle Evans.

→ *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship*, by professor of psychology at New York University, Paul Vitz.

* *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong: And What We Can Do About It*, by psychologist and professor of education at Boston College, William Kilpatrick.

→ *The Conspiracy of Ignorance: The Failure of American Public Schools*, by Martin L. Gross, who has received the NEA's School Bell Award and is a professor of Social Science at New York University.

Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas, by economist and columnist, as well as a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Thomas Sowell.

Cloning of the American Mind: Eradicating Morality Through Education, by B. K. Eakman.

Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling, second edition, edited by David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill.

Dr. David Benner (Ph.D., York University; C.Psych., College of Psychologists of Ontario) is professor of psychology at Redeemer College. Dr. Benner serves as chief psychologist for a children's mental health center and is the founding director of the Institute for Psychospiritual Health (www.redeemer.on.ca/~iph).

Dr. Peter Hill (Ph.D., University of Houston) teaches psychology at Grove City College and is editor of the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*.

Afterword

One last comment. As we throw more money into state and federal funding of education, we see a simultaneous decline in knowledge as the students go from the high school level to the college / university level. Some of what follows confronts this very issue, however brief.

Mo' Money – Mo' Money

Money does not equal performance! For instance, in 1960, Americans spent \$375 a year to educate each public school student; \$816 in 1970; \$6,146 in 1996; and over \$7,000 per pupil in the 1999-2000 school year. New York figures are \$9,321 from 1996-97 per pupil; and \$10,250 for K-8 for the 1999-2000. Alternatively, N.Y. scores the lowest in almost all test comparisons. In inflation-adjusted dollars, we are now spending three to four times more per child than in 1960, when performance was much higher... much higher! Stop spending money and start getting back to the basics! What does all this money get us?

Carnegie Foundation

A survey by the Carnegie Foundation of faculty members found that 67 percent of the professors reported, “a widespread lowering of standards in American higher education,” 75 percent characterized their students as “seriously under-prepared in basic skills,” and 62 percent reported “grade inflation” as a problem at their colleges (The Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching, *The Condition of the Professoriate: Attitudes and Trends*, 1989 [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989], pp. 19, 23, 27). Moreover, 55 percent said that undergraduates at their institution “only do enough to get by.” (Ibid., p. 22)

Just how little that is may be indicated by the fact that only 33 percent of college students put in 16 or more hours of study per week outside of class in 1985 – and this declined to 23 percent by 1988 (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Campus Life: In Search of Community* [Princeton, 1990], p. 10). As of 1966, 52 percent of all college freshmen had checked at least one book out of a library during the preceding year. By 1990, only 27 percent had done so (Susan Dodge, “Poorer Preparation for College Found in 25-year Study of Freshmen,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 20, 1991, p. A39).

Educators and parents are not the only ones dissatisfied with the kinds of students American schools are turning out. A survey of Fortune 500 companies showed that 58 percent complained of the difficulty of finding employees with basic skills (Bill Richards, “Wanting Workers,” *The Wall Street Journal, Supplement*, February 9, 1990, p. R10). The Chief Executive Officer of Pacific Telesis reported: “Only four out of every ten candidates for entry-level jobs at Pacific Telesis are able to pass our entry exams, which are based on a seventh-grade level.” (Sam Ginn, “Time to Get Down to Business on the Reform of Education,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 19, 1991, p. B3). In 1989, New York began airlifting its health insurance claims to Ireland for processing, because American workers made too many mistakes.

Class Size?

The pupil-teacher ration has gone down almost 40 percent from 1955 to 1999 and class sizes have shrunk accordingly, student achievement has not only failed to rise, but has dropped, almost in inverse ratio to the size of the educational staff.

To End

I could go on, but the point is that the problem isn't money allotted for education (students from private schools score much higher on the SAT's, and the schools spend on average about \$2,200 to \$3,000 a year per pupil); it isn't class size; the amount of money teachers earn; the parents, the school boards, etc.. It is the philosophy behind **what** is taught, and the philosophy of **how** it should be taught. Period.

Bibliography – (books I recommend for college / university level problems).

→ *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*, by Dinesh D' Souza.

→ *Imposters in the Temple: A Blueprint for Improving Higher Education in America*, by Martin Anderson.

→ *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses*, by Alan Kors and Harvey Silverglate.