

## Hope and ambiguity: returning curriculum to humanism

*Esperanza y ambigüedad: devolver el currículo al humanismo*

*Esperança e ambigüidade: Devolver o currículo ao Humanismo*

*希望与模糊：让课程回归人文主义*

*الأمل والغموض: إعادة المنهج إلى الإنسانية*

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### Abstract

Among contemporary predicaments of war, political populism, truth and communication, climate change, and the collapse of welfare states – partly because of them – we face a crisis in curriculum. The inertia of a content-based curriculum diverges ever-further from a volatile world and the major issues of the day. More importantly, it denies young people the tools they need to negotiate a complex world of ambiguity, uncertainty and responsibility for their self-determination. This article argues for a reaffirmation of European Humanistic principles in curriculum as a political strategy to bring the education of young people into closer alignment with lived realities, and to encourage them to act as informed citizens. The starting point is a research-based curriculum. We can look to the New Science of Consciousness and mind for methodological support for an enquiry-based curriculum.

**Keywords:** humanist curriculum, responsibility; educational self-determination.

### Resumen

Entre los predicamentos contemporáneos de la guerra, el populismo político, la verdad y la comunicación, el cambio climático y el colapso de los estados de bienestar, en parte debido a ellos, nos enfrentamos a una crisis en el currículo. La inercia de un currículo basado en el contenido diverge cada vez más de un mundo volátil y de los principales problemas del día. Más importante aún, niega a los jóvenes las herramientas que necesitan para negociar un mundo complejo de ambigüedad, incertidumbre y responsabilidad por su autodeterminación. Este artículo aboga por una reafirmación de los principios humanistas europeos en el currículo como estrategia política para acercar la educación de los jóvenes a las realidades vividas y alentarlos a vivir como ciudadanos informados. El punto de partida es un plan de estudios basado en la investigación. Podemos hacer referencia a la Nueva Ciencia de la Conciencia y la mente en busca de apoyo para una metodología curricular basado en la investigación.

**Palabras clave:** currículo humanista, responsabilidad, autodeterminación educativa.

Received/Recibido	Dec 06, 2022	Approved /Aprobado	Jan 19, 2022	Published/Publicado	Jun 29, 2023
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## Resumo

Entre as vicissitudes contemporâneas da guerra, do populismo político, da verdade e da comunicação, das alterações climáticas e do colapso dos Estados-providência, em parte devido a eles, enfrentamos uma crise no currículo. A inércia de um currículo baseado no conteúdo diverge cada vez mais de um mundo volátil e dos principais problemas da atualidade. Mais importante ainda, nega aos jovens as ferramentas de que necessitam para negociar um mundo complexo de ambiguidade, incerteza e responsabilidade pela autodeterminação. Este artigo defende a reafirmação dos princípios humanistas europeus no currículo como estratégia política para aproximar a educação dos jovens das realidades vividas e para os encorajar a viver como cidadãos informados. O ponto de partida é um plano de estudos baseado na investigação. Podemos fazer referência à Nova Ciência da Consciência e da Mente para obter apoio para uma metodologia curricular baseada na investigação.

**Palavras-chave:** Currículo humanista; responsabilidade; autodeterminação educativa

## 摘要

在战争、政治民粹主义、媒体及事实、气候变化、福利形态坍塌等当代困境的影响下，我们不得需要面对一场课程危机。基于内容的习惯性课程设置与我们所处的不稳定的世界及当今需要面对的众多主要问题逐渐偏离，更为重要的是，它反对年轻学生在应对世界复杂的模糊性、不确定性及自我决定的责任感中使用有效的工具。有提议认为可以将欧洲人文主义原则作为政治策略在课程中使用，认为这样可以通过教育让年轻人接近生活事实，鼓励他们成为有意识的市民，该研究对这个提议做出了进一步地认定和支持，以教学大纲为起点，借助新意识及大脑科学，为基于研究的课程方法论寻找支撑。

**关键词:** 人文主义课程、责任、教育中的自我决定

## ملخص

بين المآزق المعاصرة للحرب والشعبوية السياسية والحقيقة والتواصل وتغير المناخ وانهيار دول الرفاهية جزئياً بسببها، نواجه أزمة في المناهج الدراسية. إن الجمود في المناهج القائمة على المحتوى يختلف بشكل متزايد عن عالم متقلب والقضايا الرئيسية في الوقت الحالي. والأهم من ذلك، أنه يحرم الشباب من الأدوات التي يحتاجونها للتفاوض على عالم معقد من الغموض وعدم اليقين والمسؤولية عن تقرير مصيرهم. تدعو هذه المقالة إلى إعادة تأكيد المبادئ الإنسانية الأوروبية في المناهج الدراسية كاستراتيجية سياسية لتقريب تعليم الشباب من الواقع المعاش وتشجيعهم على العيش كمواطنين مطلعين. نقطة البداية هي منهج قائم على البحث. يمكننا الرجوع إلى العلم الجديد للوعي والعقل لدعم منهجية المناهج القائمة على البحث.

**الكلمات الدالة:** المنهج الإنساني، مسؤولية، تقرير المصير التربوي

## What world does the curriculum represent?

Look out of your window. How would you want the world you see represented to your child?

Perhaps you see a dramatic landscape with ridges and valleys; microscopic life; geometric shapes in buildings' people walking in and out of shops busy as consumers; ancient buildings and cemeteries. If so, then perhaps we want to teach our kids Geography, Biology, Maths, Physics, History and so on. We represent the world in terms of its immediate appearances.

But look beyond what you see immediately - people struggling up a ridge for a life-confirming view; the aesthetics of buildings and the complexity of life inside them; on the

street have diverse ethnicities, who walk despondently or jauntily. Now you may want to teach the 'modern' subjects: Human Geography, the Arts, Economics, Civic Education, Politics.

But what if you see a collection of fragments, a chaos of phenomena that hold material significance insufficient to contribute to a holistic sense of that world. What is not immediately obvious is any sense of coherence and pattern that lies behind it all, that what is most important lies beyond our immediate senses – we need to take a more analytical view to discover coherence. Now you may want to orient your teaching around Sociology, Social Psychology, Personal and Social Philosophy. You may even want to change from subject disciplines to Principles, Codes, Moralities, -

using these ‘sentimental’ parameters to investigate contemporary issues.

But let’s say as you look out of that window that you reflect on how trapped you are by the subjective way you see the world. You wonder what it might look like through other eyes – that maybe what you see is outdated, unsatisfying, as yet unmade, merely a starting point for social change. Now you may be more interested in stimulating young people to see the world in their own way, to explain to *you* what it looks like. So your teaching might be focused on facilitating inquiry, and you will confine teaching to equip the young person with the tools of enquiry and representation.

These perspectives lead us to conceive of curriculum across a spectrum of educational ethics. Each one holds a vision of knowledge and society that gives rise to distinctive relationships between teacher and student, between an older and a younger generation, between the interests of more and less powerful groups, and between those who are wedded to the status quo and those who seek social change. Why a ‘spectrum of educational ethics’? Because to commit to one way of representing the world is to de-prioritise others. To deny certain forms of knowledge to young people is an ethical decision.

Lawrence Stenhouse (1967, 1975) summarised these choices in cultural terms – in terms of the relationship between the individual and the culture which they are in. Do we *initiate* the young person, invest them with membership of a pre-existing culture and expect them to find their place in it; or do we *induct* the young person into the culture, passing to them the mechanisms of interpretation and construction so that they become members of the culture *with individual agency*, capable of exerting change pressure on it. Initiation or Induction.

Stenhouse was my first research supervisor, and I count myself as a ‘Stenhouse-ian’. But it has been 40 years since he died and the world has changed. I want to shift his argument from a cultural to a politically Humanist standpoint. Stenhouse underpinned his curriculum with

principles and values that are recognisably humanistic. But we can make the link between curriculum and Humanism more explicit and more tangible, for this is what is demanded by the volatile society we now live in. I write at a time of war in Europe with world repercussions, a resurgence of Fascism, and the gradual, global dismantling of welfare states. The rise of populism and nationalism is surely a product of a flawed education. How else do we account for electorates voting for divisive leaders and parties whose stated goals are to dismantle those institutions which give them essential support?

### **Humanism, mind and coherence**

We know from the new science of consciousness (Dennett, 2018, Seth, 2021) that our brains are interpretive, judgement-based ‘machines’. But this new approach to the neuroscience of perception goes further. Rather than the brain subjectively interpreting stimuli that come from the objective world – light, sound, smell, touch, etc. – our brain seems to perceive a confusing array of signals which make no inherent sense. The brain has no pre-conceived concept of ‘cup’, ‘music’, ‘smelly’. The brain - imprisoned in a dark box, blind and unhearing – projects a series of predictions about how the chaos of incoming stimuli may be made coherent, and these predictions are subject to feedback which adapt and hone them until they find ‘functional fit’ (von Glasarsfeld, 2001) or momentary coherence that allows action to happen. As a teacher walks into a classroom the young people are already processing complex arrays of data and emitting predictions: expectations about lesson content and its relevance; the nature of authority and its boundaries; the mood of the teacher and the other young people.

This is a *coherentist* way of accounting for perception, and it is opposed to *intrinsicity*. The coherentist view would say that there is nothing that is perceivably fixed about the external world, that its elements (cups, music, and acrid smells) have a non-contingent existence (ie. unvarying with context or

methods of observation) – or, equally, that the nature of subjective experience makes such an ‘objective realist’ phenomenon irrelevant, at best (Hoffman, 2020, argues that *what* and *how* we perceive is not designed to capture reality, but to interact with those parts of reality that allow us to negotiate a world we cannot ‘truly’ perceive). All that is perceived is provisional, and dependent on context, mood, level of awareness, etc. All that is perceived is contingent reality – or what *stands for* reality. This is in opposition to *intrinsicity* which says that when we perceive a phenomenon – say, a cup – what we perceive is its intrinsic quality – its cup-ness – which we can store and recognise another time. That cup-ness guarantees the perceived existence of the cup and its durability. A cup is a cup is a cup.

I won’t go into any detail about this contested aspect of philosophy, other than to say that it has a great deal to say about those ways I set out above in which we choose to represent the world. The English National Curriculum, for example, tends greatly towards intrinsicity – there are many ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ answers which can be tested. A mountain is a mountain as we (intersubjectively) see it; a street full of people is just that. Whereas the International Baccalaureate (IB - Primary Years Programme), with its method of research and enquiry, tends the other way – to the contingent, interpreted view of the world – a mountain is what is made of it at different moments. The degree to which we are prepared to diverge from the *literal* representation of the world and its immediate appearances - to enter into phenomenology (diverse ways of seeing), *metaphor* (‘this’ stands for ‘that’), and *contingency* (reality is given by context) - is the degree to which we are forced to recognise the intellectual autonomy of young people.

Of course, dualisms are not accurate, and violate the argument I am about to propose. But we tolerate them where they serve as useful mechanisms to enter critical analysis, and this is an important characteristic of social humans, too. For example, if we and those around us – and apparently the whole human

race – appears to agree for the time being the single reality that liquids can only be held in objects with hard and stable surfaces (cups), then how would be able to distinguish this shared subjective phenomenology from the presence of an intrinsic, objective reality? Is the cup really there? Do we see the same thing? Are we merely agreeing on a linguistic (descriptive) device? In the world of belief and action we – from early years kids upwards - are perfectly capable of managing such confusions, and we can even live with deep phenomenological uncertainties such as the diverse ways those around us see us; our belief that one’s Zodiac sign really does describe our basic character, knowing it is little more than superstition; our capacity to watch theatre, understand that it is fiction but that it speaks of true experience; not knowing whether the cup is still there when we look away. Think of a classroom itself, which has a highly unstable reality: now it’s a teaching/learning space; now it’s a refuge from an abusive family; now it’s a theatre for youth dramas; here, it’s political scenario for overweening politicians, while there it is a place of cultural oppression (Kushner, 2022). But young people and teachers manage it with ease and skill, swapping roles and identities as events dictate.

We live, that is to say, in a world of metaphor and ambiguity – we are perfectly capable of managing the dissonance between what is immediately apparent, and what is metaphysically claimed – between the literal and the magical. This is a defining (social) human characteristic, a sophisticated skill set of any young learner; and it is folly to think that our skilled handling of metaphor and uncertainty can be suspended for the convenience of writing an elegant curriculum that has no contingent relation to those at whom it is targeted (teachers and students). But we do live in a world that habitually seeks stability in folly. After all, against all experience, we still engage in war imagining that it will have desirable, positive outcomes. And we continue to label young people as (academic or behavioural) ‘failures’, imagining that this, too, will have overall



positive outcomes. Both are absurd, but made rational.

One way of explaining the success of humanism is its gradual easing us out of a literal/metaphysical world into a world of phenomenology, individualism and ambiguity. From the Renaissance on, the liberating success of art leads us to a world in which our tastes and desires have been profoundly influenced by Romanticism, Expressionism, Impressionism, Abstraction, Modernism/Postmodernism, democracy, Improvisation, Punk and so on and so on. The reinvention of Western tonality by Schoenberg, the reinvention of linguistics by James Joyce, and the mind-bending cubism of Picasso give back to us the responsibility to interpret and *re*interpret the world – the core of the humanist message. In the early days of European humanism Caravaggio’s representation of the Madonna as a harassed housewife (cf. *Madonna of the Pilgrims*); Tintoretto’s representation of the *Last Supper* taking place in a busy bar; Albertinelli’s depiction of a dismayed Mary, having to be consoled by Elizabeth following the annunciation (cf. *Visitation*) – all were elements of a public curriculum designed to provoke the citizen into accepting responsibility for their own spirituality and personal vision. Pre-Renaissance (Byzantine) representations of these events and people presented spiritual authority as inaccessible, ineffable, non-contingent (see, for example, universal representations of the *Madonna and Child* such as that of Duccio di Buonisegna – enigmatic gold background, child as miniature adult, stylised woman’s face, no inviting perspective).

We should not imagine that such a public curriculum had no social force behind it, or that it was somehow detached from the realities people lived. Caravaggio’s Madonna could not be looked at passively by any woman. It is provocative and a maelstrom of ambiguity – the Madonna had to work to earn her divine status. And those art examples were exhibited in a civic context of 75% literacy, a politically restless citizenry and under the glare of

international judgement. Possibly the most interesting aspect of Renaissance iconoclasm is that it was not just tolerated, but sponsored and promoted by the wealthy and powerful. In a more limited way, we saw the beginnings of a parallel scenario during the volatile period of the 1960s, though that was quickly snuffed out by a more knowing and jealous class of politicians and wealth. But we should note in passing that this latter period saw extensive experimentation with curriculum in the UK and the USA (Kushner, 2022) – again, both brought to heel.

It is not a stretch to move from the interpretive shifts that were made by Renaissance artists to a similar shift in school curriculum (one that is long overdue). Too much of the school curriculum has, as it were, that lack of depth of field and impenetrable, non-contingent background as Duccio’s Madonna. The divine world concealed beneath her gold background is paralleled by the authoritarian university knowledge-managers lurking behind curriculum. And just as those Florentine artists had to discover perspective, metaphor, ambiguity and iconoclasm to invite the citizen to take control of their own spirituality, so that challenge faces curriculum artists – ie. teachers. The art of teaching no less than the art of representation is an endeavour that has a humanist ethic at its core.

And yet, our job is exponentially easier than the Renaissance artist. The *Mona Lisa* took 15 years of unparalleled skill and imagination for Leonardo to achieve the ultimate outward representation of complex inner psychologies. We can begin to accomplish the same in a few lessons with a teacher’s sensitive and skilled selection of evidence with which to introduce the student to the complexities of thought and values. Reality, under increasingly humanist regimes has become our playpen. Like kindergarten children we have become skilled players at the most routine but intricate day-to-day level of action and thought. We can juggle with the surreal (Kushner, 2010).

What does curriculum have to say about this?

## Humanism in curriculum

Humanism has many and diverse definitions. But there are features that are common to this diversity – common even to secular and Judeo-Christian religious Humanism. These are a familiar as:

- Individual agency as a standard
- Self-determination as a social (and educational) goal
- The requirement for authority to justify itself in rational terms
- The legitimacy of argument, and its resolution through rational consensus
- Empathy and altruism as social norms
- Tolerance of – even curiosity towards - difference
- Means-end rationality

This list of moral imperatives is rarely to be found as a complete set, and we might even imagine a society that enforced these to be a difficult one to live in – something like the *Truman Show* or *Stepford Wives*, in which these were merely an ethical facade allowing more malevolent aims to be pursued elsewhere. Indeed, many of our supposedly less savoury characteristics – cynicism, mutual manipulation, suspicion, ethical dishonesty – serve as protections against those powers which might exploit such a domesticated/humanist population for authoritarian ends – back to the *Truman Show*. A society utterly committed to these principles in dogmatic terms would be forever vulnerable. Because in those terms mentioned above, this group of ethical standards cannot be taken as non-contingent imperatives in the Kant-ian sense – universal unappealable standards. Each one has to be interpreted and accommodated according to the context of action. It is imperative to study the mind and the life of a Nazi concentration camp commander (Sereny, 2011), but not so as to empathise, tolerate the difference he represents, much less respect his *right* to argue

his case (though we may assert *our* right to understand his case in the interests of prevention).

But those humanist markers serve as an ever-receding standard, a group of ethics towards which we lean for our betterment, but which are not true destinations. They serve as a values framework within which we can judge the moral worth of a curriculum. In practical terms, they serve as criterial guides for our journey towards educational quality. To reiterate, these are not fixed standards to be imported into any situation or context. As a curriculum framework they function more as signals to issues or investigative goals – areas of dispute and contestation that cannot be passed over. Within an inquiry-based curriculum, for example, we might ask the students to conduct an investigation into aspects of community life, using these criteria to help them frame questions.

Let's look at a concrete example. In the 1990s the OECD sponsored an environmental awareness program in schools, entitled *Environment and School Initiative* – the ENSI program (Elliott, 1999). Here are some of its aims:

- *how are the complex relationships between human beings and their environment best represented and explored through the curriculum?*
- *how to effect changes in the organization of schooling which will enable environmental education informed by ENSI's values and principles to become part of mainstream curriculum provision which is accessible to all students?*
- *how to develop pedagogical strategies for handling in an educationally defensible manner the value issues raised by attempts to involve students in action to improve the environment?*
- *how to use evidence generated by the environmental sciences to inform student inquiry into local problems?*
- *how to involve teachers in finding answers to the above through a process of*

*collaborative action research within their schools?*

Where we are concerned to understand a humanist perspective in the students' inquiries, in the curriculum itself, and in the school as a sponsoring organisation, those criteria above allow the students to frame practical and searching questions. *'To what extent are local policies towards the environment open to critique?'*, *'what is the texture of public debate about environmental issues?'*, *'to what extent do local initiatives encourage or discourage individual self-determination?'*, *'how is a consensus forged over controversial environmental initiatives?'* *'How accountable are local leaders?'*

The point of this is to show how curriculum can allow a transfer of intellectual authority to the student – to acknowledge the confusion of incoming perceptual signals and to allow the student to make sense of them in their own terms. Von Glasarsfeld (opp.cit.) explained Radical Constructivism as facilitating the student to theorise about their world until they have developed a theory that finds *functional* fit with their life. Once the student has left the classroom to conduct her investigation she is, as it were, 'flying solo'. It is only beyond the classroom (or beyond the immediate reach of the teacher) that knowledge is being generated, that abstract principles are being adapted in practical terms to real-life scenarios.

In fact, the learning potential in humanistic terms is far greater in such a scenario – as the ENSI project was to reveal, and as we showed in an evaluation of the International Baccalaureate in New Zealand (Kushner et al, 2015). Once the student is conducting an investigation into, say, the school's local community, they will inevitably run into complexities, such as people expressing views that may be unwelcome, unsavoury or simply at odds with their own. Now they have to resolve the question of ownership of data, and their responsibility as managers of data – ie. as custodians of knowledge. Now they are in the position of their teacher, faced with humanistic dilemmas over others' rights to intellectual

autonomy and self-determination. In fact, they have to confront the reality of themselves as figures of authority in a humanistic world, and they have to reconcile all the complexities that come with that. Do they suppress views? Do they acknowledge views that may undermine their own values and arguments? To whom are they accountable for such decisions – and how do they justify their decisions? The student is an *agent* of those same humanistic principles that give them the freedom to generate new knowledge.

Now the curriculum is achieving its full humanistic potential at a second order. We may note in passing that the student is experiencing the same methodological complexities that confront the educational researcher - the ethics of data management, and so on. But there is a layer even beyond this. The experience of the student in juggling ethical decisions mirrors the practice of many of society's professionals. When an officer leaves the police station to police the streets, she does so far from the gaze of the police manager and must improvise, using discretion and judgement. Policing policy and management directives are merely guides to action but cannot dictate action. Professionals must learn from their practice and act autonomously responding to people and circumstances using discretion and personal judgment. Our social institutions are humanistic.

The humanistic curriculum cannot be confined to the classroom. Each pedagogical decision, and each student decision arising from it involves existential choices, and these carry implications for the way we behave in normal social situations. As Dewey insisted, there is a seamless citizen-oriented connection between classroom and society. How does this work in a humanistic classroom?

Sartre (2013) argued that each decision we make in a social situation is a choice, and all choices carry implications for how we see others, for how we see society. In the International Baccalaureate students are rehearsing making choices, exploring the

consequences of both thought and action. The underlying questions they are always addressing are, ‘*who are we in relation to others?*’, ‘*how do we want to be?*’, ‘*how ought we to be?*’. Though this is framed in more pedagogical terms, it reflects the three questions underpinning Jerome Bruner’s humanist curriculum *Man: a Course of Study*.

- What is human about human beings?
- How did they get that way?
- How can they be made more so?

Stenhouse, in fact, became the UK agent for this curriculum, on the basis of his own humanist curriculum, *the Humanities Curriculum Project* – which was also an inquiry-based project, exposing students to the complexities of diverse data on contemporary social issues and requiring them to debate and resolve. Such issues might be ‘war’, ‘relations between the sexes’, ‘poverty’ – all topics on which the student had to reflect, debate and arrive at *and defend* a personal values-based decision. In existentialist terms, the shift is from *what student learns* to *who they should become* (Goodlad, 1967) – covered by the right to self-determination, and, at least, to demanding justification from those authorities which might deny them self-realisation. In Pinar’s (2011) terms, “*an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engagement in the world*”, and which, says Pinar, involves the Pragmatist struggle to be both “*philosopher and human being*” at the same time – ie. reflecting on life as we live it.

This is the moment to return to the opening of this journey into a humanist curriculum. What we see here are the mechanisms of a *coherentist* position. Students may or may not enter the community to conduct their investigation with a given theory in mind. If they do, they assume a coherence to what they will see before the experience. If they do not, they will confront the challenge of *constructing* or *discovering* coherence – ie. social *theorising*, rather than imposing a theory over the reality we perceive. The humanist

position is the coherentist one in which coherence has to be discovered and reported, learned from observing contingent interactions between constituencies and elements – ie. how people talk, and talk to each other.

## Contingency

The principle of *contingency* is central to the humanist view of curriculum, and to the coherentist position. It is faithful to the reality that we live in a world of feedback – that actions have consequences; that who we are and might be inevitably concerns how others interact with us; that our humanity is essentially social and based on contact. Sartre’s view that all choices imply a vision of the society we want to live in means that we are constantly testing that vision by reviewing the feedback from our choices. We may be arrogant, or we may be passive, and our resolve to be so arises out of how our social stance finds ‘functional fit’ with our immediate world. We make choices – do they work for us *and them*.

Where the *International Baccalaureate* (IB) works well it exposes student enquirers to challenges they have to resolve, and the inevitably broadening range of choices become available to them as they listen to others’ lived experiences, so their vision of the society they wish to be a part of becomes more problematic and more sophisticated. The study of contingency – how one element of the mosaic of life interacts with others through force-and-feedback – is the process of discovering, rather than assuming or superimposing, coherence.

Nor was it as an aside that I mentioned above that this same principle underpins good professional action. Think of the police officer or the community mental health worker or the social worker engaged in a similar exploration as the student of the IB. Of course, they have a practice to attend to, but in the terms introduced by Donald Schön (1987) in the USA and by, first, Stenhouse (1975, 2012) and then Elliott (1991, 2012) in the UK and Europe, professional practice *is* an enquiry – the aim of the enquiry is to respond to feedback



in order to constantly improve the practice. This almost seamless connection between schooling and professionalism strengthens the humanist purposes of curriculum. Not only in the obvious sense that the humanist/enquiry-based curriculum is a good preparation for professional working life, but in the broader sense that we are contributing to the moral direction of society and its institutions – given that our social institutions, from school to courtroom to hospital, are where modern society invests its humanist resources. It is to our social institutions that citizens look for humanist support, and for school students to be rehearsed in the way humanist society works through contingent relations, proper expectations of institutional interactions is disseminated and prepared. It is, in this sense that we might say, with John Dewey, that students are not preparing to *become* citizens – they *are* citizens.

Better to say that in schools and classrooms they are our social institutions that are preparing for *their* citizen role. A humanistic take on schooling and curriculum requires us to make this inversion in order to properly respect the autonomy and rights of young people. Schostak (1983 – another student of Stenhouse) made just this inversion. A core national educational issue at that time was said to be students who were “*maladjusted*” to school – ie. antithetical to behavioural requirements of school discipline. Schostak conducted an extensive case study of a school, carefully documenting the experiences of both teachers and young people. He found that supposedly recalcitrant youth were acting perfectly rationally, in their own interests and according to their own (often educational) values. It was the school whose values and rationality were too narrowly defined to be able to respond to their needs. The school was unable to adjust to the culture of young people. Schostak titled his book, *Maladjusted Schooling*.

### **Sad realities, happy futures**

There is little immediate prospect for implementing humanistic curriculum – for

denying literalism and insisting on uncertainty and ambiguity; for acknowledging the student as their own theorist of life. The energetic Right-wing will not tolerate it; the liberals will not risk it; the Left (including the Social Realists) are too focused on high-stakes theoretical combat. We are in the grip of technicians, those who claim, as did British Prime Minister Tony Blair, that there is ‘no ideology in education’. We are stuck here for the foreseeable future.

But the situation has a pathology to it. As crises of economics, politics, climate and culture impact the lives and options of young people, so their education and schooling will appear more oppressive, too restrictive to allow for independent action, too narrowly conceived to give freedom to respond autonomously. Pressure will grow for a more responsive and open education. Well – maybe. It may play the other way, of course – that the misinformation and denial of individual self-determination wins out and freedom gives way to compliance and domestication. Those forces are strong and in full operation, too. We have seen the clash of these two states elsewhere – in Chile, for example, where school students took to the streets to oppose, first, the educational status quo, and then conservative reforms. Students at Manchester University in the UK rebelled against a conservative Economics curriculum that had lost its roots in moral philosophy, and forced curriculum change.

These and others, including the M15 movement in Spain are momentary examples, small-scale skirmishes that speak of underlying forces. They are easily suppressed or assimilated. But what we have learned over the longer span of history is that European Humanism has exerted yet more massive forces on social change – like grass growing through concrete, inexorable, cumulative. That society has, over hundreds of years, yielded to humanist imperatives, and that curriculum must surely follow. To whom do we look for this more optimistic view?

Rorty (1998, 1999), the predominant modern advocate of Philosophical Pragmatism, provides us with a narrative. He argues that as society becomes more complex, and as social leaders choose to acknowledge and address that complexity, so we become aware of new challenges, of multi-faceted problems and dilemmas. The need is to broaden the resource base to address this, to broaden, if you like, the skills base. Hence, the emergence and rapid growth of the professions – and of the range of professions; hence, the universalisation of access to education; hence, the emergence in the post WW2 period of the massification of higher education. At the same time, the growth demands of capitalist economies insist on an ever-wider consumer base. The net result of these pressures is an

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- So we go with Rorty and hope for more expansive futures, even as we are forced to endure a world of economic austerity whose sad progeny are cultural and imaginative austerity. A humanist curriculum remains a candle burning in that window which looks out onto a troubled world.
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**Revista ELectrónica de Investigación y EValuación Educativa**  
*E-Journal of Educational Research, Assessment and Evaluation*

[ISSN: 1134-4032]



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