

ABSTRACT

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This study reviews major contributors to existential philosophy and those who have analyzed its relationship to American education. This paper also describes the elements and characteristics of an existential education in theory and how certain aspects of existential theory were implemented in three schools. The study concludes with an explanation of the positive implications for incorporating existential ideas into American education.

# THE INFLUENCE OF EXISTENTIALISM ON AMERICAN EDUCATION

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	1
Purpose of study.....	2
Delimitations.....	2
Limitation.....	2
Definition of Terms.....	3
Design of the Study.....	6
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
Existential Philosophy in General.....	7
Existentialism in Education.....	21
III. IMPLICATIONS OF EXISTENTIALISM IN EDUCATION.....	29
The Role of the Teacher.....	29
Functions and Characteristics of Existentialist Education.....	30
Early Implementation of Existential Education.....	32
IV. EFFECTS OF EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY FOR AMERICAN SCHOOLS.....	35
Background.....	35

CHAPTER	PAGE
Case Studies: Humanistic Approaches with Existential Concepts.....	38
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	46
REFERENCES CITED.....	48
ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	50

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

As a philosophic school of thought foundational to education, existentialism has been criticized for not being systematic in the usual sense (Wingo, 1974), and for not treating the problems of education formally (Kneller, 1958). At the same time there are hopes that existentialism will become a vital philosophy in the construction of an appropriate curriculum for the education of individuals in a mass society (Wingo, 1974). Works of European philosophers from the late nineteenth century to the present time have described the roots of existentialism; however, existential thinking and its application to education is not mentioned in Anglo American literature in the philosophy of education until the second half of the twentieth century.

As a student of education, the author has found existentialism to be not only an interesting subject in philosophic study, but also a useable method to clarify individual confusion about learning. By tracing the existentialists' ideas and the writings

of philosophers of education, this study will paint a clear picture of the influences of existentialism on Anglo American education. This study will also serve as scholarly training for the author who will research works of existential educators and philosophers, organize them in chronological order, and present the result to the academic community.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to research the historical writing of existential philosophers who have addressed education, and to elicit their views and convictions about a possible existential education system. In addition, this writer will attempt to identify the influences of existentialism on education at the present time.

### Delimitations

1. This study only examines the influence of existentialism on Anglo American education.
2. When using the term "American education," it means education in institutions, in Anglo America, offering education from the elementary through post-graduate levels.

### Limitations

The scope of educational issues addressed by American existentialists is primarily dependent upon their work and publications. Hence, the writer might exclude some topics in

education because they have not been addressed by existentialist authors, or the writer might exclude some existentialist authors because they have not written about issues in education.

### Definition of Terms

The definitions of the following terms represent a consensus among the existential authors reviewed by this writer for this research:

#### Anguish and Death Education

A subject matter in existential curricula based on the assumption that understanding the concept of death gives students a strong feeling of existence. By teaching this subject matter, teachers are offering some fundamental existential influences to students. Kneller (1958) stated, the dilemma of our existence can elicit nothing but terror; yet satisfying answers may be achieved only through a reflection originating in an awareness of the importance of our existence. The idea of death does not preclude the hope of life.

#### Authentic and Authenticity

Authentic implies being fully trustworthy in accordance with fact or actuality. It also has the meaning of being worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to fact or reality.



### ✓ Choice and Responsibility

The concept of choice is accompanied by responsibility in existential thought. For existentialists, making choices means simultaneously assuming the responsibility for their meanings and consequences. By realizing the consequences of the choice one makes, one takes up the responsibility for the act at the same time.

### ✓ Essence

The individual, real, or ultimate nature of a person or a thing as it exists in human consciousness, as opposed to mere existence.

### ✓ Existence

The state and fact of being, independent from human consciousness, which is an essential element of "essence."

### ✓ Existentialism

A philosophical movement embracing diverse doctrines centering on analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for his or her acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong or good or bad.

✓ Freedom

The concept of freedom is recognized as a spontaneous, creative power of self-determination in the sense that nature and our own motives are the materials for our free will (Foth, 1972).

✓ Humanism

An attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values. A philosophy that usually rejects naturalism and supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization.

Possibility

A potential or prospective reality, within the limits of motive, ability, capacity, or power.

✓ Self-realization

One of the ultimate aims of existentialism. It is defined explicitly by Foth as "the development of one's immanent potentialities of character and intelligence by identifying oneself imaginatively with the spirit of the best that has been said, thought, and done (1972, p.6)."

### Design of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. The first chapter provides general background information on the attraction of the author to existentialism, the limitations in doing the study, and explanations of the terms that are used in existential philosophy.

The second chapter summarizes the findings from a review of the related literature. One section focuses on existential philosophy in general, the other section focuses on existentialism in education.

Chapter three presents the basic elements of existential education, and the implementations of existentialism as a philosophy of education.

Chapter four discusses the outcomes of existential philosophy for American schools in terms of curriculum design, applications in instruction, and other possible future influences on the education system.

The last chapter sets forth the author's conclusions concerning the value of existentialism for American education. The author also speculates on the likely future influence of existentialism on American education.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Existential Philosophy in General

Schrag (1961) stated that the philosophy which has most sharply pointed out the ambiguities of the Western tradition as it seeks to deal with the most basic problem of humans' knowledge of themselves is the philosophy today known broadly by the name of existentialism. Among the important figures in existential thought, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the Danish philosopher, is considered the first person who brings the existential terminology and ideas into a new era of Western thought. Kierkegaard was convinced that such questions as "What does it mean to exist?" and "What does it mean to believe?" were so ordered that the latter could not be discussed until the sense of the former had been clarified (Schrader, 1967).

Although he could be whimsical, Kierkegaard's writing indicates the inextricable unity of thought, decision, and action. Kierkegaard uses the terms passion, earnestness, inwardness, and subjectivity interchangeably to bring out a new type of thought about the human condition. A religious person, Kierkegaard

also discusses religion in a very passionate and existential manner.

✓ Under the title "The subjective truth: Inwardness truth is subjectivity," Kierkegaard writes:

When the eternal truth is related to an existing individual, it become a paradox. The paradox repels in the inwardness of the existing individual, through the objective uncertainty and the corresponding Socratic ignorance. But since the paradox is not in the first instance itself paradoxical (but only in its relationship to the existing individual), it does not repel with a sufficient intensive inwardness. For without risk there is no faith, and the greater the risk, the greater the faith; the more objective security, the less inwardness (for inwardness is precisely subjectivity), and the less objective security, the more profound the possible inwardness (as quoted in Bretall, 1947, p.219).

It is this emphasis on subjectivity that marks Kierkegaard as a —passionate and religious existentialist. In his work, subjectivity is the starting point; freedom is the center; decision making is the key; the human passage from birth to death is not finally a topic for science but for faith; and in life existence precedes essence.

During the second half of the 19th century, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), the German hermeneuticist, becomes the first of four (among Ortega, Jaspers, and Heidegger) existentialists to base philosophy on the idea of life. Human existence is prior to thinking, theorizing, and philosophizing. Human beings have a natural life which subsists in an element that surrounds, imprisons, obscures, and confuses. That element is the world, the physical world and the cultural world--the product of nature and the product of history (Ortega, 1984). Human beings, Dilthey observes, not only have a nature, but more importantly, a history. A human being is thrust into a culture the facts of which must be taken as they are present in the life that attempts to establish coherent unity in all it feels, perceives, desires, thinks, and wills. And in this existential life, Dilthey insists, the whole is prior to the parts (Ortega, 1946).

Then comes the tragic German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) who shows us the possibility of a world of "superman." To Nietzsche, it is by means of internalized contest that one transforms negation, suffering, and evil into affirmation, vitality, and growth. Nietzsche stated that "a trying and questioning was my every move; and verily, one must also learn to answer such questioning. That, however, is my taste--not good, not bad, but my taste of which I am no longer ashamed and which I have no wish to hide" (as quoted in Greene, 1967, p.106). Nietzsche challenges humans to use their freedom to increase their freedom, to choose

so as to increase their power power to choice, to be creative, to promote earthly happiness, to struggle to create meaning and joy in absurd and melancholy circumstances. Nietzsche's intensive viewpoints on human conditions had been a matter of controversy, yet Karl Jasper observed that it is only at the arrival of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard that a philosophy of existence makes its appearance and inaugurates a new era of thought (Sanborn, 1968).

Though he never claimed to be an existentialist, and was indeed the quintessential idealist, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) provided thoughts that were recognized as methods or tools for existential philosophizing. The founder of Phenomenology, Husserl called the contents of the conscious mind "phenomena" after the Greek word for "appearances." Any mental content, according to Husserl, is an appearance of something, whether real or imaginary, present or absent, object or idea. Phenomenology is the systematic study of these mental appearances (Kneller, 1984). To Husserl, phenomenology is also a defense of reason. Commenting upon Husserl's ideas about reason, Natanson stated:

Reason, in its ideal sense, is protective of the reflective principle: for all consciousness there must be the possibility for turning back on itself, a lonely recoil in which the individual and the topic of his/her attention are united. In reflection, ideas seek their limits of development and the individual becomes the one who sets aside occurrence in order to

understand its source and goal. To discover oneself as a reflecting being is then to place in one continuum subject and object, reflector and reflected upon (1973, p.18). To Husserl, it is the human beings who intentionally give meaning to every phenomena by way of conceptualization. What cannot be conceptualized, cannot be experienced. Imagination enables us to explore not only actualities, but also what is more important: possibilities.

According to Husserl (Kneller, 1984), we derive most of our basic concepts from the "lifeworld" (Lebenswelt). This is the every day human world of homes, jobs, and hobbies, the world in which we work, socialize, eat, and sleep. To understand the lifeworld properly, we must describe--phenomenologically--the concepts through which we give it meaning.

Husserl's influence was extended by one of his most gifted students, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Heidegger examined not only the human mind as Husserl did, but he also applied the phenomenological methods to human existence as a whole. Heidegger asked, what basic characteristics do we find if we look without presuppositions (Kneller, 1984)? This fundamental question about human existence was also asked by other philosophers who are known as existential phenomenologists.



Asking "What does existence mean to a human being?" and searching for the answer to the question "Why is there anything rather than nothing?" are essential directions in Heidegger's work. For Heidegger, philosophy is the science of being, and a philosophical study of human's being is the task of existential analyses (Stapleton, 1983).

Heidegger joins Ortega and Merleau-Ponty in rejecting Husserl's strategy for studying phenomena by putting the world in brackets. Phenomenological method, according to Heidegger, elicits from a variety of experiences certain pervasive structures of experience. Experience is basically emotional and practical, not intellectual nor merely cognitive and mental. We are given to ourselves in a world of other things and persons; we suffer and enjoy that world and try to survive and prosper in it. What thinking we do is secondary. We have concern about our circumstance first of all, we don't just think about it (Hartshorne, 1983). In his Being and Time (1927), Heidegger says everyone meets this world in different moods, and the most important mood is anxiety (Kneller, 1984). Kneller elaborates what Heidegger meant that the most important mood is anxiety:

Anxiety shows me the three basic traits of the human condition--my condition. First, I am free. I am responsible for what I become. Second, I am "thrown" into the world, and I must die alone. My life is my own to make and my only one. Third, I live most of the time like everyone

else. Nothing distinguishes me. Yet I might have been different (1984, p.33).

Above all, Heidegger exhorts, be authentic. Late in life he told an American admirer that a central factor in human existence is gratitude (Hartshorne, 1983).

The Catholic physician Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), also played an important role in existential philosophy. To Jaspers, who is also a psychologist, philosophy is a human--and humane--enterprise in which human beings become truly themselves by an exercise in self-understanding. Philosophy is concrete, not abstract; a process of thought which never comes to an end. Philosophy is a reflective lifting to consciousness of the contours of concrete life, to the end that human beings shall be more authentically aware and free (Schrader, 1967).

Jaspers' philosophy is the philosophy of the encompassing. Everything we know is an object within a horizon of objects. Increase in our knowledge merely pushes the horizon further out. The horizon which contains all horizons is the encompassment (Schrader, 1967). To Jaspers, it is by the fundamental operation of transcending thought that we reach the awareness of the encompassing. As Schrader stated:

Transcending thought exists as an inner process and cannot be objectified. Awareness of it comes only in carrying it through. To communicate it one does not give results to another, but leads him/her to do it himself/herself (1967, p.120).

To Jaspers, appropriation of a philosophy consists in creative interaction with it, not necessarily in agreement or acceptance, and it does not spoil the exchange when one party decides that s/he must reject the presented conceptual schemes, which are, after all, only tools of communication (Schrader, 1967).

The Spanish essayist and lecturer Jose Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) elaborates Dilthey's point that human life is always within an historic culture, and Leibnitz's point that living, thinking, and choosing always have content, i.e., objects. "The true, primary, fundamental reality is life, the interplay of I (myself, my ego) and my circumstance (surroundings--including other people, material things like my body as well as phenomena, my psyche, ideas, memories, presuppositions, purpose, reason, belief, and even God) in time (Marias, 1967, p.447)."

Reviewing the meanings of human existence, Ortega states that human beings are projected into existence: life is given to us as a problem we must solve; we feel shipwrecked; we must act or drown. Though anxious, we need not despair. We are supported by our culture, by our beliefs. We are faced by a repertory of possibilities; they are not unlimited, but they are ample, we are free to become other than we were. We live by compulsory choice among the possibilities. We choose for some purpose for which we are morally responsible. When we are true to our purpose, our project, our plan, our vocation, we are authentic, creating what

we are going to be. Though there is danger, and a fatal dimension, we may achieve an elegant solution, we may forge a beautiful life (Ortega, 1960 & 1969).

In France, Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) uses drama as a vehicle for his expressions of existential thoughts. Marcel, perhaps the most outstanding Roman Catholic representative of existentialism, submits a distinction which is central to his entire philosophy, that of "problem" and "mystery" (Kneller, 1958). What is the nature of being? This inquiry not only presupposes an affirmation of "I am" but also continually involves the participation of the subject. To Marcel, there is a certain "mysterious" element in existential problems (Kneller, 1958).

Marcel uses the terms "observation" and "testimony" to describe the relation of the transcendent to life itself. Observation occurs to everyone who sees the phenomena. Anybody could have seen the phenomena. But testimony, on the other hand always shows a certain identity. It is "I" or "You" who give the testimony. By giving testimony we commit ourselves to someone or something beyond ourselves. In Marcel's word, we commit ourselves "before a transcendence" (Kneller, 1958, p.55). Whatever testimony we give, we transcend the observation first in order to make the commitment (testimony). Marcel carefully emphasizes that the transcendence does not lie beyond experience.

Marcel (1950) states that there must exist a possibility of having an experience of the transcendent as such; and unless that possibility exists, the word transcendent can have no meaning. Kneller interpreted what Marcel's idea is of a consecrated and devoted life:

Life and experience are a gift. Bearing witness, making an inward commitment to life, is our way of participation. If we are ever to understand the basis of life, we must make this inner commitment (1958, p.55).

The gentle, optimistic, Jewish existentialist, Martin Buber (1878-1965) goes beyond bearing witness to maintain that the self grows only through communion with others. Without "the other," he says, the "I" cannot develop. Buber is deeply religious, for him the ultimate purpose of communion and growth is to imitate God who created us in His image (Kneller, 1984).

Though contrary to the religious ideas of Marcel and Buber, the existential thoughts of another French writer, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) are not totally different from those of Marcel, Buber, and Ortega. A novelist, dramatist, and philosopher, Sartre expressed his thinking in various forms. Sartre uses two terms "being-in-itself" (*etre-en-soi*) and "being-for-itself" (*etre-pour-soi*) to construct his philosophic perspective. "Being-in-itself" is described as a being that is reducible to an object,

though never entirely so; on the other hand, "being-for-itself" is a being that is a free subjectivity (Schrader, 1967).

Sartre stresses that each of us is completely free. To be free is to choose, and we should choose anew in each situation. For Sartre, humans are actually "condemned" to freedom. Freedom can be agonizing, and the realization that one is absolutely responsible for one's life is tormenting. One way one could escape from this anguish is by lapsing oneself into what Sartre calls "bad faith," that pretense that one is not really free (Kneller, 1984). This is certainly one challenge that Sartre offers to everyone who thinks existentially. Like an optimistic pessimist, Sartre states that life must be lived in risk and uncertainty and in the permanent possibility of despair. And because of this realization, humans should courageously face and solve the problems of their lives.

Sartre, the first philosopher to accept the label "existentialist," also defined "existentialism" and defended it. In doing so he says that no book of ethics can tell humans what to choose. Sartre contends that in choosing "we can never choose evil." We always choose the good, and nothing can be good for us without being good for all, and the only way to determine the value of the possibility we choose is to act, invent, create. But in choosing we always have to reckon with probabilities and the fact that our action is limited and cannot force the world and its

possibilities to conform to our will. There is no human nature to depend on; we cannot count on others, nor rely on human goodness. Non-the-less, though life may be absurd, "I should involve myself...there is no reality except in action...and man is nothing else than his life...a series of undertakings." "Man makes himself. He isn't ready made at the start. In choosing his ethics, he makes himself (Sartre, 1945, p.20)."

Nicola Abbagnano (1901- ), Italy's chief exponent of existentialism, turns from the nihilistic and anguished themes of Heidegger and Sartre and instead stresses man's faith in himself, his use of and his hope for a fuller future. Freedom signifies choice, and choice signifies possibility. Rejecting the absolute equivalency of all possibilities (the despairing position of Sartre and Camus) and also rejecting the equivalency of all human possibilities except one--the possibility of death (Heidegger's position), Abbagnano contends that the human must determine--in every situation what the realities of one's possibilities are through (1) reasoning inquiry to define one's motives and to liberate oneself from presuppositions and prejudices, (2) scientific methodology to predict consequences, and (3) action in which tentative truth is risked and an enriched future is created. Finally, Abbagnano, like Buber, repudiates the extreme subjectivity of his Danish, German, and French predecessors: he recognizes the cooperative brotherhood of man and the duty of one human toward another; he does not see society as submerging the

individual, but rather as supporting the individual. Some societies enhance individual freedom by increasing genuine possibilities (Abbagnano, 1969 & 1972).

One of the youngest of the twentieth-century existential philosophers, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) has gone even farther in emphasizing action. To Merleau-Ponty, a human being is not basically a Husserlian thinker who perceives phenomena and creates mental pictures of the world, but an actor directly linked to the world through the body (Kneller, 1984). People relate to the world primarily through their senses. We know the world because we explore it bodily.

If there is a name of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, it might as well be "behavioral existentialism." Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological method is best understood and fully realized in practice. It begins in the world, and is not limited to bracketing, analyzing, nor thinking. It requires experiential activity, bodily sensations, emotional experience in addition to and alongside of cognitive activities. This phenomenological approach is concerned with the body, space, physical things, and other human beings. From these reflections one develops an understanding of the subject of preception, human "being-in-the-world." The examination and description of perception and the perceived serve in turn to reawake our experience of ourselves by discovering the environment (milieu) in which we exist (Schrader, 1967).



Ralph Harper (1915- ), the first American to write as an existentialist, points out "man is a being who can question himself, and, of all the questions that can matter to him, no question matters more than that of his own status and destiny (1948, p.16)." This is the starting point that made existentialists stand out among other philosophers.

The questions "Who am I?" "What sort of being am I?" "What is the meaning of existence?" are perennial existential inquiries. And what one knows takes on a new meaning when "dipped in the well of existential dynamism (Harper, 1948, p.22)."

To Harper, the existentialist wants it clearly understood that anyone's life is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be experienced, and one will go to any lengths in order to maintain this distinction between life and thought. One is not justified in denying truths in order to do this, but one shares the common human's contempt for ignoring the simple things of life; one is to be distinguished from the common human by the nature of the simple things one holds dear. But in general people may summarize the existentialists as impatient fellows, whose emotions are not divorced from their power of understanding.

Harper (1948) states that one's existence is being consumed without recovery--one knows this if only through feeling one's body's tempo of subsistence. One cannot forget that one is a

little incarnation, spirit in flesh and bone, here and now; one cannot forget because one feels oneself and thereby both understands and evaluates his/her existence. One feels, and thereby knows, that everyone dies alone and in one's own way. Here Harper has clearly indicated that it is the "body" that feels and experiences this world, not the "world" that makes different individuals. And as experience is never limited, a human's development is never complete.

#### Existentialism in Education

As early as 1952 a group of graduate students in educational philosophy at New York University had collected their thoughts on existentialism in education and published the article "Existentialism and Education." To them, the implications for education in existentialism's theory of knowledge hold that the origin, structure, method, and validity of what is learned depends on the learner. The stable, secure learner or teacher stands on his/her convictions and his/her freely chosen actions. In accepting responsibility, for choice and consequence, s/he no longer remains the puppet whose strings are pulled by authoritarian higher-ups (Brameld, 1952). This group's work set forth the belief in the existentialist's concern for commitment, for self-realization, for creativity, and for social direction and responsibility, as among the positive contributions to life as a whole.

In 1954, Fallico and Morris each published articles under the same title "Existentialism and Education" in Educational Theory. Fallico (1954) in his article criticized the rationalistic and scientific views of humans as incapable of helping existing humans to disclose themselves, to become authentic selves. Above all, rationalistic and scientific views promote the delusion that anybody can enter the teaching profession, whether s/he knows existence or not.

To Fallico, existential teachers always bear the fundamental question in mind: "How can we guide humans to choose to become self-determining agents in their thinking and in their valuing without asking them to give up the privacy of their own self-birth into being?" The primary aim of existentialist education, for Fallico, is the confession of ignorance. The habit of examining one's self and one's purpose; the habit of assuming full responsibility for one's judgments of value and for one's choice in life is all that education can and should give to a person. And this is what existentialist education affirms. Lastly, Fallico emphasizes that what entitles a person to be a teacher is not determined by formal education alone, but, by one's capacity to love others as much as one's self.

Six months after Fallico's article, Educational Theory published an article by Van Cleve Morris also titled "Existentialism and Education." In his article, Morris

suggested that existentialist educators should not only provide room for learning that uses the scientific method to solve problems, but also they should be interested in developing the affective side of human beings. An existential teacher tries to develop in his/her students a capacity to love, to appreciate, and to respond emotionally to the world about them.

→ Morris went on to say that the existential school will inevitably become more individual-centered. Students would not only be encouraged to examine and criticize the cultural tradition they were inheriting with a view to its improvement and reform, but they also would be concerned with developing that integrity in themselves necessary to the task of making personal choices of action, taking personal responsibility for their choices.

Finally, Morris insisted that if education is only what experimentalists stated, a social undertaking perpetuating and interpreting a social system to succeeding generations, it will not be an authentic learning experience in existential terms. In his closing comments, Morris initiated a discussion of the feasibility of existential education in this country.

A year later Ralph Harper (1955) responded to that issue in "Significance of Existence and Recognition for Education," and he suggested a positive existential approach to education. Harper stated that the existentialist wants to educate the total

human. It is the emphasis on one part of education rather than on another that marks particular philosophies. Existentialism is concerned with the individual as a whole in the situation in which one finds oneself. Harper describes the timely impact of existentialism by saying that a person born in the twentieth century has problems which were not problems for a person living one hundred, or seven hundred years ago. Existentialism directs one's attention to this fact.

Another emphasis of Harper is time. We not only have to choose, we have to choose responsibly. We may be capable of everything, but we do not have time for everything. One must live in a time that does not demand too much and yet permits everything. To Harper, existentialism promotes the free development of the total human in the situation in which one finds oneself. But freedom does not mean freedom from responsibility; rather, it means the freedom to responsibly commit one's self to values and to person. There is no conflict between truth and freedom, between freedom and authority, nor between freedom and commitment; they are all inextricably linked.

George F. Kneller (1958) in his book Existentialism and Education prescribes a concentration on the individual as an authentic and unique personality. The restoration of human beings to a position of original dignity, no matter what one's talents, is the expressed hope. Kneller's book is the first to attempt

this restoration of the dignity of the individual human through the treatment of existentialist philosophy, on a large scale, in education.

Kneller stated that the doctrine of sociality teaches that the individual will lose her/his loneliness if s/he is taught the right way to belong to, and behave in, the group. But even in the group, the existentialists realize, the individual does not escape her/his loneliness. In fact one may become homeless, because one has abandoned one's real home, which is one's own authentic self. But this does not say that the existentialist would prevent the individual from joining the group. The opportunity is always afforded, but acceptance of the opportunity never results from social pressure; rather, it springs from one's own will.

In understanding student behavior, Kneller states that the teacher must bear in mind that whatever goal the student has set for himself/herself, the student must so strive to achieve it that his/her potential accomplishment is a matter of supreme importance for the student alone. The personality becomes realized in the things it makes or does. In considering the curriculum, most existentialists give the humanities a central place. For Kneller, it is the spiritual power of the humanities, and the essential urge for affirmation inherent in all forms of art, that attract the existentialist. To read and see and feel how human

beings in history have struggled with their consciences, labored with fate, rebelled against existing orders and absolutes, and poured life-blood into their creations becomes a source of inspiration for existentialists as they approach learning (Kneller, 1958). As far as scientific learning is concerned, Kneller indicates that specialization in any field must be complemented by liberalizing studies, for it is the person who counts, not the profession.

To Kneller, an existentialist approach is the heart of positive and optimistic education in the school system. The strength of existentialism lies in its recognition that humans are striving, aspiring, responsible beings, and in the belief that mood and feeling are capable of understanding and even interpreting the nature and destiny of humans at points where the intellectual approach no longer serves. There certainly will be pains for striving to become an authentic self; but to the existentialist teachers, this is far better than luring a person into a false, illusory sense of security.

Later, Van Cleve Morris published the book Existentialism in Education: What it Means and indicated that existential education assumes the responsibility of awakening each individual to the full intensity of one's own selfhood. Morris also stated that an instructional method pursuing a goal like this should possess a working knowledge of the self. In the book's last

chapter--"An Existentialist Pedagogy"--the self is defined as:

- (1) a choosing agent, unable to avoid choosing one's way through life;
- (2) a free agent, absolutely free to set the goals of one's own life; and
- (3) a responsible agent, personally accountable for one's free choices as they are revealed in how one lives in one's life (1966, p. 135).

The teacher's imperative, to Morris, is to arrange the learning situation in such a way as to bring home the truth of these three propositions to each individual.

#### Emerging Themes from a Review of Existentialism in Education

From this review of the writings on existentialism in education, there are certain general themes that emerge. First, the belief in the value of every human being as an unique and irreplaceable individual. Second, the possibility for every learner to experience self-realization by self-examination. Third, the efforts which help the learner become aware of personal responsibility. Fourth, the emphasis on affective teaching and the importance of humanistic courses and decision-making skills in school systems. Fifth, the recognition that every individual is a free human being, able to choose and make decisions among all kinds of possibilities. Sixth, the demonstrations of individuals' personal accountable for his or her actions. Finally, the student-centered approach in the educational setting is a



consistent concern of existential educators. Through capable teachers and carefully designed curricula, students may reach the ultimate goal of existential education--the authentic self, the fully functioning person.

## CHAPTER III

### IMPLICATIONS OF EXISTENTIALISM IN EDUCATION

An existential education begins as early as any other education. Though existentialism is not originally intended for education, no opportunity should be lost to suggest or show or explain the limitations as well as the possibilities and challenges of life in every form of teaching. As Kneller (1958) indicated, no teacher or school system is so innocent as to believe that educational functions are performed without reference to ideas on the nature of human existence and one's ultimate purpose in life. The prime purpose of the school--to preserve and improve the culture of a society--is well served by education that enables the students to fulfill their highest potentials.

#### The Role of the Teacher

An existentialist teacher wants the students who through their education have experienced the discovering of the infinite depths of the world and truth without giving up any of the partial truths they have encountered along their learning processes. The existentialist teacher believes a person whose mind is liberated is not detached from truth. Rather, the more one has submerged oneself wholeheartedly in the subject matter

of one's reflection, observation, and insight, the freer one is. The highest goal in existential education is students who hold something to be true because they authentically experience it to be true, rather than having come to this truth by imitating a teacher. This truth can be influenced by logic, persuasion, or the actions of others, but it is ultimately a matter of personal choice involving physical and affective, as well as cognitive, processes. When one's ideas are thought out and acted on anew, as for the first time, by oneself, it is the beginning of a free mind in the person.

Harper (1955) stated that there are teachers who should be discouraged from teaching, not because they have no ability to transmit certain kinds of knowledge, but because they do not know the difference between making slaves of their students and making free human beings. The teacher's character should be both honorable and responsive, devoted to the truth of the subject he or she teaches, and responsive to the minds and characters of the human needs of his/her pupils.

#### Functions and Characteristics of Existentialist Education

Foth (1972) mentioned that one of the basic function of an existential school appears to be the maximum development of rational decision-making so that the student may become self-reliant in the choice of preferred ideals and values. This identifying characteristic of existential education may not be

knowledge as such but rather educability. This type of education cannot be imitative, neither can it be premature. The forced feeding of the diverse conclusions of others or materials unrelated to the relevant needs and understandings of the student can hardly provide the experience for learning that the existentialist educator advocates (O'Neill, 1962). The process of self-perception is not taught submissively but rather is acquired through the freedom of direct experience and the weighing of possibilities, the making of choices, the taking of actions. The reorientation of personal attitudes and behavior through increased freedom becomes the common motive and result of existential education.

The existentialist theory of cognitive and moral self-development does not conflict with the principles of Jean Piaget, the Swiss psychologist and educator. His studies of the stages of intellectual development emphasize the importance of learning through activity and interaction with the environment. This encouragement of the children's own manipulation and experimentation as the preferred avenue to knowledge is consistent with existential assumptions. The internalization of concrete experiences are allied to intellectual and emotional growth and development. Piaget also claims (Morris, 1976) that in the learning process there is no breach between the cognitive and the affective domains, for feeling is always an aspect of thought.

### Early Implementation of Existential Education

So subjectively true in itself, existentialism in education will function well if applied early in the school system. One way to accomplish this is described as Philosophy for Children, or the thought-provoking curriculum.

Philosophy for Children is a set of materials, a method of inquiry, and an orientation to knowledge (Morehouse, 1982). By reading the stories which are designed to provoke students' logical thinking, to stimulate inductive reasoning, to compel students to examine their attitudes about justice, etc., students become familiar with many other tools of philosophical thinking and different patterns of thinking skills. Discussion and conversation are the key tools in the classroom, and the teacher assists the students in defining issues and in developing tools to understand the relevant topics under discussion. From elementary to high schools, the different levels of reading materials provide opportunities for contemplation for students and gives curiosity a place in the classroom. Questions are welcome in the course, inquiry is conducted within the community of the student, answers are sought, but the emphasis is on the search more than on the product of the search (Morehouse, 1982).

It is not necessary, and may not be possible, to present philosophy in the elementary or secondary school as it has traditionally been taught in the college or university. Lipman

(1982) pointed out that philosophy is still philosophy when it has shed its technical terminology and its history of systems of thought but retains its emphasis upon the logical discussion of ideas that matter to students and teachers alike. And that is the reason that the readings of Philosophy for Children are story-like, clearly expressed, and do not involve difficult terminology.

The whole notion of promoting Philosophy for Children relates to existential education because of the hope for better self-realization and self-expression as potential outcomes for students. It is not enough for students simply to learn the content of academic disciplines; to be truly educated, such students need to be able to think in those disciplines (Lipman, 1982). The earlier the students experience thought provoking situations, the clearer image they have of personal, societal, and cultural issues, and the better the choices they will make and act on when required to do so. However, the proper route to this goal involves the identification of the reasoning and inquiry skills appropriate to the practice of each discipline, and the assigning of the responsibility for such skills to the teachers of those disciplines. This approach, according to Lipman (1982), is unfortunately quite unworkable. The teachers in the specific discipline areas argue that they cannot take time out from teaching their disciplines to teach the skills necessary to think in those disciplines. The important point, thus becomes that the thinking

skill should have been acquired by the students earlier on.

There are personal and social advantages in making philosophy a part of the early school curriculum. As curriculum represents a world of skills and knowledge for a student to explore and experience, philosophy exploits upon the desire of students everywhere to discuss issues that are important to their lives and in determining their relationship to the larger social order.

## CHAPTER IV

### EFFECTS OF EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY FOR AMERICAN SCHOOLS

#### Background

As the theories and structures of a philosophy helps to shape the application of an educational system, the outcomes of such an educational system also describe the values and effectiveness of the underlying educational philosophy. An examination of self actualization as the philosophical basis of education suggests that humanistic educators share with existentialists the desire to search for personal meaning in human existence (Morris, 1976). Existential education is closely relate to humanistic teaching, an approach in schools to help students to become the best of what they are able to become through cognitive, affective, and physical growth. With the humanistic approach in mind, education should be a matter of "learning to grow, learning what to grow toward, learning what is good and bad, learning what is desirable and undesirable, learning what to choose and what not to choose (Morris, 1976, p.352)." Morris explicitly states:

An important purpose of humanistic education is to help the learner work out the significance of what has been learned in relation to the meaning of his or



her life. People who know themselves are people who are passionately and infinitely interested in their own existence. Hence, they go beyond mere intellectual acceptance of what has been presented to them, for they are concerned with what knowledge means for them. Like Socrates, they not only think but also act and feel. In sum, humanistic education is a process of self-actualization--becoming a fully functioning person (1976, p.353).

✓Kierkegaard in his Journal asked "...what good would it do me if truth stood before me cold and naked, and not caring whether I recognize her or not, and produced in me a shudder of fear rather than a trusting devotion?" (as quoted in Bretall, 1947, p.5). As Kierkegaard and Morris suggest, the concern of education should be how to connect and make relevant to the learners every subject matter they consider to be true.

Teachers will find it hard to induce students to grow to a certain level of self-actualization if they do not show an existential faith in education. Public opinion polls are openly used on the notion that what the majority thinks is right, is right. Describing the effects, Reid, a contemporary idealist, stated that "one is the loss of a sound sense of personal individuality in the face of the tremendous drive to social conformity. "Much so-called 'progress' is in the wrong direction--toward a mass conformity, a stereotyping and machine-making of

taste and opinion, a conditioning of response by psychological techniques. "And all this goes along with a kind of emptiness, and a fear of realizing it (1965, p.157)." Bloom, though not an existentialist, indicated this danger sharply "there's a kind of psychobabble--people trying to make themselves feel good about themselves without any real capacity for self-awareness. (1987, p.78)."

The question is how to reduce over-adjustment, conformity, and anomie, and how to support individuality, creativity, and autonomy while recognizing the need for social understanding and cooperation in this mass age. There is no reason to believe that individuals who are in the teaching profession are less efficient, hardworking, or caring than other people. The problem is that society does not describe its expectations of them in a consistent, coherent voice.

The construction of an existential education like any other educational system depends on the carefully designed curriculum. Curriculum represents a world of skills to develop and knowledge for a student to acquire, and experiences to explore. The development of personal freedom and appropriate habits of mind are important goals in existential education. Curriculum planning for existential education must take account of the complexities of thinking, and experiencing, and find ways of structuring opportunities for highlighting issues that will induce authentic personal development.

There are some ideas and concepts which can be "understood" at the cognitive level without giving young people an appropriate experience to appreciate their full qualities, e.g., responsibility, freedom, and democracy. The difficulty with some aspects of a belief system is that they can only be fully appreciated if experienced in meaningful ways. This is not to say that schools should have a "belief system" with which students are to be indoctrinated by their teacher, but it is not sufficient, either, to say that such a belief system would only exist in the hidden curriculum. Teachers first of all should map out the conceptual territory and the related "experiences" and then find out how they will be covered within the existing subject areas; if gaps are identified by this process, then someone must be given responsibility for planning the coverage. Finally and always, students should be frankly and forthrightly apprised of the curricular agenda.

#### Case Studies: Humanistic Approaches with Existential Concepts

There are many programs in school systems which aim to help students reach an integration and a synthesis of affective, cognitive, and whole body learning. The cases studied here are closely related to the developmental framework of a humanistic education which includes some existential education concepts.

##### 1. The Living School in New York City

The Living School was established in 1968 by the Institute

for Advanced Study in Rational Emotive Therapy in New York.

Designed by Albert Ellis, the basic assumptions of this program are (Reynolds, 1982):

- (1) Emotions come from perceptions and evaluations of reality and not from actual situations.
- (2) When emotional problems and practical problems coexist, it is preferable to work on the emotional problem first before tackling the practical problem.
- (3) Beliefs can be either rational or irrational, Rational beliefs follow from reality, are self-enhancing, and result in appropriate emotions; irrational beliefs do not follow from reality, are self-defeating, and result in inappropriate feelings.
- (4) Appropriate feelings are an appropriate response to the situation, facilitate goal achievement, and are moderate as opposed to extreme reactions; inappropriate feelings are an inappropriate response to the situation, impede goal achievement, and are usually extreme reactions.
- (5) Each individual is responsible for generating each emotion experienced.
- (6) A primary goal of Rational-Emotive Therapy is to teach people to accept themselves unconditionally.

To acknowledge the existence of the self as a complex conglomeration of traits, abilities, and behaviors that cannot be rated globally.

- (7) Humans are biosocial animals who are the product of an interaction between inborn predisposition and experiential learning.

Ellis divided the therapeutic educative process into five stages:

- (1) Rapport: to establish an intersupporting relationship with the children.
- (2) Assessment: to determine who has the problem, what the problem is, and what will the course of therapy entail.
- (3) Teaching emotional problem-solving skills: understanding emotions; teaching about beliefs and critical thinking skills; teaching the basic of cognitive change (by rational emotive imagery, a technique for practicing changing cognitions).
- (4) Practicing the problem-solving skills: monitoring feelings; making a list of personal demands; practicing rational emotive imagery (REI).

- (5) Assessment of change and skill acquisition  
(Reynolds, 1982).

Teachers at the New York Living School utilize Ellis' theory in their teaching; the program maintains that the best way to help all children is to teach them a strategy for identifying, questioning, and behaviorally working against self-defeating attitudes, feelings, and behaviors.

2. The Glasser School in Palo Alto, California

The psychiatrist and the author of School without failure, William Glasser promoted the love-oriented theory in the classroom. The schools without failure involves (Morris, 1976):

- (1) positive involvement of teachers, students, and administrators,
- (2) concentration on present behavior rather than on emotion,
- (3) the learner's evaluation of the ways in which his or her own behavior contributes to personal failure,
- (4) selection of a better course of action,
- (5) commitment to one's choice and enactment of it, and
- (6) holding the learner responsible for his/her commitment and action.

According to Glasser (Morris, 1976), in a school without failure teachers, administrators, and students are deeply and warmly

involved with each other and with the school. Moreover, students and teachers must be concerned with present behavior rather than emotions or feelings, because emotions or feelings are the result of behavior, and it is the latter that can be readily observed, assessed, and changed. The students are encouraged to evaluate the actions that are thought to be responsible for their failures. But along with the self-evaluation they are allowed to choose a better alternative course of action by seriously considering the possibilities they see in suggestions made by teachers and others. However, once the choice is made, students are required to commit themselves to the choice and to carry it out. And after all this is done, the teacher does not accept any excuse for nonperformance but helps the student as often and as long as necessary until the student finally succeeds through recommitment and renewed efforts. Only by learning to fulfill one's commitment can one gain maturity, respect, love, a successful identity, and an authentic self.

In the concrete structure of this program, Glasser suggests three class procedures (Morris, 1976):

- (1) The social problem-solving meeting: students and their teachers take a positive approach in solving problems such as interpersonal conflict, loneliness, vocational choice, and so on. An appropriate atmosphere for critical thinking, discussion, and problem-solving is created.

- (2) The open-ended meeting: students raise and discuss questions regarding their curricula, school policies, and so on. This provides opportunities to stimulate students' ability to think and apply their knowledge to whatever is being discussed.
- (3) The educational-diagnostic meeting: to determine the extent to which the class understands or does not understand what is being studied so that further plans and changes can be made to ensure students' academic success.

Glasser's school without failure is a school with emphasis on sharing, participation, and trust. He also sees the school as a means of counter acting the depersonalizing and dehumanizing forces in modern society.

3. The Affective Education Program in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Designed by Norman Newbery (Simpson, 1976), this program suggests that by understanding personal interior life and personal thought-topology, can one learn to plan his/her inner world. And by conceptualizing and labelling one's emotional reactions, these reactions can be real, internalized, and understandable. The educational goals of this program are to improve the learners' affective development, to fulfill the learners' affective needs, thus, to accomplish the achievement of general, and personal knowledge and the knowledge of human relations.



The curriculum design of this program at the elementary level is based on the use of a work-book, also called the Sharing Book (Simpson, 1976), to promote students' conceptual and affective skills. Sentences in the work-book for students to complete emphasize asking "what," "so what," and "now what." At the high school level, the emphasis of the curriculum is on urban affairs, communications programs, and literature. Instruction emphasizes the active reactions of students and the understanding of the experiential meaning.

One important part of this program is the in-service program for teachers. Three phases have been described as follow (Simpson, 1976):

- (1) Awareness-Responsibility training: teachers receive training through experiences and classroom assignments that connect deepened awareness of the feelings of self and others to their professional lives.
- (2) Practical teaching experience by following one of the three curriculum models: Confluent Model, Trumpet Model, or the Affective Education Program Model.
- (3) Teaching skills training: teachers practice the skills needed to deal with the "life concerns" of power, relationships, and identity; and the skills needed to cope with classroom procedure and the presentation of subject matter.

The main goals of the Affective Education Program are to improve a healthy personal understanding, to improve a meaningful interpersonal relationship, and to appropriately control one's own behavior.

The three case studies are some samples that illustrate in the educational environment some of the humanistic characteristics closely related to existential concepts. These educational programs emphasize examining students' feelings and the emotions that affect the process of learning. They indicate a student-centered school program rather than a content-centered education. Individual freedoms, choice, and responsibility is stressed in the programs. Self-awareness and self-realization, which are important characters in an existential education, are also points stressed in these three schools. Lastly, the teacher's role in these three schools is described as a communicator and a facilitator, and subject matters or classroom activities are carried out as forms of offering or sharing instead of transmitting or giving. These are the goals and methods that an existential school will strive to realize, not only in the field of humanities but also in the social studies, and, as much as possible, in the natural sciences.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In accordance with the proposed plan for this study, the significance of existentialism has been reviewed from the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard to the French existentialist Merleau-Ponty, and from the earliest American reaction paper on existentialism and education from a group of graduate students to the recent adaptations of existentialism in humanistic approaches in particular American schools.

Although the originators of existential philosophy have almost never written about its applications in the classroom setting, it is recognized, embraced, and used among all sorts of other philosophies as a foundation of education. The fundamental goal in an existential education, as currently conceived, is to set up an environment to help students develop the desire to realize their freedom; to become clear about themselves and the possibilities before them through incessant observation, reflection, and self-analysis; to develop the ability to do the most subjective, logical, and scientific thinking necessary to choose well; to learn to act decisively and take responsibility for the consequences.

This study has also pointed out the importance of the teacher's role in an existential education. Also, this study has noted the potentially positive outcomes for children who are provided with well grounded, philosophic material and situations during the early school years. The three cases studies indicate existential education's strong influence on humanistic education in some schools.

In its educational aspects, existentialism builds upon its philosophy of freedom, choice, and responsibility. The criticism of activities in existentialist schools comes mainly from those who mistakenly perceive the flexibility as carelessness and the emphasis on freedom as anarchy. There are always possibilities for improving the nation's educational systems and schools; the existential approach to education is certainly one possibility that ought to be given important consideration.

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