

# **The Human Age in Education**

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American society is riddled with political corruption variously called graft, scams, scandals, or other description. In fact, misfeasance is so widespread a majority of our citizens believe that all optimistic predictions for the human race are examples of Pollyanna thinking. However, in spite of ubiquitous mischief, it is possible to identify clear-cut positive trends in our society. That is, despite the broad road of deviousness there remain constructive events that can lead to healthy outcomes. We need to remember the old truism, "It is an ill wind that blows no good." The purpose of this writing is to describe a path of hope that could become a viable alternative for a significant portion of the educational community, the Human Age in education.

Human beings have a basic need to orientation in a space-time continuum. Indeed, anthropologists, archaeologists and historians have specialized in identifying the time periods through which the Earth has passed. This article identifies a space-time location for educators in order to explicate the positive factors of our present situation and to launch ourselves effectively into our future reality. In short, if we correctly identify our emerging Zeitgeist, it is possible we can cope with it more productively.

One means to orient ourselves can be found in Figure 1 (Carkhuff, 1988), which identifies critical phases of human evolution. Carkhuff has placed humankind currently in the Information Age. A host of other writers concurs with this observation and thus believes that our culture presently is dominated by the press of information.

Carkhuff has illustrated that historical ages often are defined by a characteristic that typifies the most significant accomplishments of the age. Thus, we have the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, and more recently the Electronics Age and the Information Age; each of these ages has specified either some natural resource or technical capacity that overshadowed all other aspects of that period. It seems remarkable that, as yet, human beings have not had their time history, a Human Age.

						Information
					Electrical	
				Industrial		
			Agrarian			
		Tool Making				
	Homo Sapiens					
Homonid						
3.5 billion Years	14 million Years					

**Figure 1**  
Critical Phases of Human Evolution

**Human Age**

Even though the historic naming systems have frequently used either natural resources or technical factors to overshadow people, the evolution of human activities has portended the emergence of human beings as the dominant resource of a forthcoming period. It is as if human life has been germinating in preparation for its full flowering. The underlying message is that it can be said that a Human Age has unfolded when, and if, the human race focuses upon fulfilling its positive potential. Thus, the Human Age is: The period when the earth's focus is upon the realization of humankind's higher order potentials, i.e., loving, thinking and sound physical health.

It may be helpful to define the Human Age colloquially by contrasting it with previous ages. For instance, we can imagine a person of the Agrarian Age proclaiming, "Look how our plants are growing!" A person of the Industrial Age might brag, "Look at what our machines can do!" Someone in the Information Age could hold, "Look at the data our computers can produce!" In the Human Age an individual may say, "Look at how well people can live together!"

There are signs that the Human Age is already emerging. One major catalyst for this event is that the limits of machines are becoming more vivid. Scientists are finding that it is seemingly impossible to give emotions to computers and people still beat those electronic marvels on even the simplest tests of creativity. In short, when the higher order potentials of human beings are compared to those of our most complex machines, human beings arguably are clearly superior.

Therefore, in the long run our wisest ploy is to invest heavily in the development of higher order human abilities.

The foregoing notion is supported by the fact that the human mind is far superior to that of electronic computers. For example, it is estimated that the human brain contains 100 billion neurons and that each is capable of interconnecting with 50,000 others (Diamond, 1984). Our current mental challenges have hardly scratched the surface of the capacity of the human brain. Yet, it far overshadows computers for conceptual thought.

The previous statements indicate that we have much to do before we have tapped the resources within people of us. This is to say that if we are to produce the highest order achievements, people, not machines, will attain them. This understanding is beginning to penetrate the awareness of enough people to generate a critical mass of activists who will lead the commencement of a Human Age. Translated into operational terms, there is a need to devise an educational system that develops human beings' highest order abilities because our fulfillment depends upon it. In many respects the invitational model, developed and promoted by Purkey and others (Purkey & Novak, 1984; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987; Purkey & Stanley, 1991), embraces assumptions about human potential and about a humanistic process for creating beneficial environments. Whatever model or models we choose, a first step is to understand how traditional institutions and beliefs will contribute to or detract from the Human Age. Two such traditions include religion and education.

## **Religion and the Human Age**

The emergence of a Human Age does not mean that people will displace God. Rather, it means a fulfillment of the grand purposes which a loving God has endowed upon humankind. Conversely, if in our thinking we continue to subordinate our highest human activity to the world's natural resources or our technical abilities, we can never achieve God's loftiest purposes for our development into His fullest creation. This high regard for us is reflected in writings such as the biblical assertion that "People are created a little lower than the angels." Thus, within a religious frame of reference it is only as we strive toward our highest possibilities that with God's aspirations for us. In this sense, our struggle for our optimum development will make us partners with God, not equals, but co-laborers.

## **Education and the Human Age**

The Human Age has vast implications for education. Indeed, such an idea stands in stark contrast to the pedestrian purposes that dominate the present education enterprise. Indeed, such a vision entails some specific alterations in current educational climates and among them are:

I. Liberation rather than control: The educational climate would shift from constricting the conduct of learners to welcoming their divergent attempts to free their constructive talents, however unskilled initially. The interpersonal climate would be warm, supportive and cordial. Non-human resources also would be easily and generously accessible.

II. Consultation rather than indoctrination: The formal school atmosphere would give way to easy informality as helpers become friendly consultants to and encouragers of the learners.

III. Celebration rather than punitive evaluation: Rejoicing over constructive effort would become the hallmark of education while punitive evaluation would disappear. It would be assumed that sound efforts were the preferred path to credible products. The correlated assumption would be that enthusiastic efforts rise most easily from non-punitive, encouraging feedback. Thus, all healthy effort would be greeted warmly.

IV. Surprised reception rather expected prediction: The concern for predicting student outcomes would yield to genuine wonderment at the unexpected creative products of learners.

V. Discussion rather than lecture: The role of teacher-as-authority would yield to teacher as fellow learner. As excited co-learners, teachers and students would engage in dialogue about topics of mutual interest.

VI. Love rather than refection: The mutual recognition of the intrinsic worth of each school participant would replace the competitive atmosphere in which one person's success requires another's failure. Interdependent ventures would be the vogue.

VII. Enjoyment rather than suffering: Laughter and healthy joy would replace the humorless atmosphere of most classrooms. Classes would focus on locating positive events that could be greeted with joyful enthusiasm.

VIII. Beauty rather than ugliness: Lovely sights and sounds would replace the bland austerity of current school climates.

IX. Thought rather than memory: The continuing integration of new data would replace the search for fixed truth. The underlying assumption would be that humankind's understanding of everything emerges and increases thus creating a need to continuously reassess all knowledge. We live in an expanding universe physically, emotionally and intellectually.

The main thrust of the changes required for an education in the Human Age is the formation of an inviting atmosphere rather than prefabricated programs. This direction evolves from a realization that when people's abilities are facilitated they emerge unpredictably and their new needs generate new requirements for

learning facilitation. The specific needs and learning programs must be positioned dynamically as the process unfolds. This does not mean chaos, but rather a continuous matching of needs with resources.

### **Learning Procedures**

A Human Education will require an educational process that differs from traditional classroom instruction. The main difference would be in the relationship between teachers and students. Instruction would take place among cooperative coworkers rather than between the expert and the uninformed. This model already is being applied widely in medical schools including Harvard University Medical School (Tosteson, 1990) where The New Pathways program uses Problem-Based Learning (PBL). The medical students study in groups with a facilitator who prompts their inquiry with appropriate questions. The course content develops from a series of patient cases for which the learners formulate treatment plans. The students discuss their plans with the group and use library, laboratory and human resources as sources of information. The results indicate that when compared to learners in traditional programs the PBL participants like the content better, learn as many facts and acquire more of the attributes of life-long learners. A salient point is that the medical model of instruction (PBL) as well as similar efforts in many other schools already demonstrate that it is possible to deliver an educational experience to learners that is consistent with the goals of a Human Age.

The central aim of a Human Age school would be to immerse all participants in an atmosphere in which their highest order behaviors (loving, thinking, and sound physical health) could emerge in an inviting climate. One assumption is that all people have a potential for high order behaviors and that those attributes are developed most easily in situations that invite the use of highly civilized responses. In short, the hope is to consciously cultivate the characteristics that add to human civilization.

A second assumption of Human Education is that as higher order abilities are emphasized simultaneously and automatically, people will be prepared to participate effectively in fundamental tasks such as earning a livelihood. Indeed, a majority of occupations in this age already require higher order skills. Therefore, in the future, people who do not receive a Human Education will be handicapped vocationally.

### **Historical Perspective**

Human Education is not new. Throughout history, gifted parents and teachers who understood their children's higher order abilities have supplied them with an education similar to the one described in the foregoing section. The exciting, new quality of the present situation is that a larger and expanding number of people

comprehend this type of education and collectively are able to generate a sufficient effort to make it a reality for a growing number of human beings. Therefore, the Human Age may be upon us and civility may soon become a reality for a significant part of the human race. This is to say that more people will think, love and be physically healthy.

### **Potential of the Human Age**

The awesome potential of a Human Age is overwhelming in some ways. Realizing this potential requires boldness and a strange kind of assertive humility that dares to claim the positive promises of our creation. The hope that we can be much more than we are forces us to reach into ourselves to actualize the marvelous potential that lies within. In many ways our previous failures have shaped us toward a cynical view of ourselves. Our collective self-concept borders on that of losers. Seemingly, we doubt the possibility of a better way. Yet, our successes tell us clearly that we are more than globs of purposeless, hopeless protoplasm.

Implementing an educational process for the Human Age will provide the opportunity to give our children something far beyond polluted streams, polluted skies, polluted soil, inadequate medical care, deteriorated libraries and a huge financial burden for each of them. We can leave them a planet where children will have a better opportunity to become loving, thinking, healthy human beings.

### **Conclusion**

In the midst of America's present widespread confusion and despair, a growing group (not a majority) of people is discovering that they have constructive potentials worth developing. In short, they believe they can become loving, thinking, physically healthy human beings in the full sense of those words. In order to attain their goal these people need an education to equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to realize their highest potential. Since such an approach does not currently exist in most schools, a new educational context has to be created in many communities. Such an effort would focus upon the development of an inviting school climate that encourages and welcomes the emergence of the healthy human abilities of all participants. The invitational approach mentioned earlier is one that espouses this type of philosophy (Purkey & Novak, 1984).

The creation of an educational enterprise for the Human Age is a worthy goal for our nation and is a proper alternative to the short-sighted educational system that focuses primarily on shaping people to meet the needs of our industrial complex. If an educational enterprise were created, it would be a fitting legacy for the generations who may otherwise be remembered historically for pollution,

poorly managed health care systems and a heavy financial burden for every citizen. It is worth the effort.

We have before us two clear alternatives. One is to continue with an educational system that neglects our higher order abilities (loving, thinking and physical health) and remain on a path that confines us to the world of political corruption and self destruction. The other path invites us to create an educational enterprise that will develop our higher order abilities and enter the Human Age with hope and fulfillment. The choice is ours, but it requires a willingness to relinquish our old behavioral patterns and to adopt newer, healthier ones. The gains will be worth the cost.

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