

university teaching that have been judged as excellent by the only legitimate criteria – the opinions of students; and there is some evidence of a change of attitude towards new ideas. The conclusion to be drawn from the UNESCO report is that by opening the gates of higher education wider than ever before, we have solved the problem of “getting the horse to water” but we are no nearer to understanding “how to make him drink.” Until that issue is resolved, the teaching-learning process at university, or indeed at any level of education, will remain less than satisfactory.

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**Carl Bereiter. MUST WE EDUCATE?  
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.  
146 pp. \$2.75.**

This book comprises the most recent statement of the reputed American educational psychologist who is now Professor of Applied Psychology at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto. Bereiter, who earned his reputation as a scholar in the field of compensatory education as a result of his early work with Siegfried Engelmann, continues to use the behavioral methods of rote-learning found effective with poor black children in the States, with Indian and working-class children in Ontario. While it has been subjected to radical, if not conclusive, criticism from many circles, Bereiter has never abandoned his key concept of “verbal deprivation,” according to which: “The language of lower-class Negro and Mexican American children is not even an underdeveloped version of standard English but is a basically nonlogical mode of expressive behavior which lacks the formal properties necessary for the organization of thought.”\*

In the Preface to *Must We Educate?* Bereiter takes a side-swipe at those, such as Edgar Friedenberg and William Labov, who took his word on verbal deprivation in vain and, referring to them as “undiscriminating readers” (p.v.), ignores their criticism and proceeds as if it did not exist. This is unfortunate for one who proclaims himself to be in the scientific tradition and as if to prove it, quotes

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\*Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann, *Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Preschool*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966.

Bertrand Russell (p. 24) with admiration. Russell understood that a necessary condition for the scientific method is the openness of the researcher to all available evidence and that the truth of his theories lies in their ability to take such evidence into account. The comprehensiveness of the scientific attitude can hardly be attained by one who merely ignores what he does not like to hear because it does not tally with his findings. Rather than accept this as the approach of the scientist, Russell would have taken such behavior as a sign of the fanaticism to which men are often led by religion. The quasi-objective character of Bereiter's work should not blind us to the subjective biases which it betrays. What exactly these are becomes clearer as we read the book.

*Must We Educate?* is divided into two parts, the first of which is called "The Moral Dilemma in Education." It contains the core of Bereiter's apparent liberalism – apparent because he wishes to abolish one of the very rights for which such liberals as the Benthamites and John Stuart Mill fought so hard: the right to free, universal public education. Bereiter objects to public education in the name of individual liberty or what he calls "the right of people to be different." (p. 11) If this appears somewhat paradoxical, it does so only until we realize that Bereiter's notion of a free society is one in which the intervention of the State in the running of people's lives is, if not non-existent, at least kept to a minimum. In terms of education, this means that he prefers private schools to public schools ("The fact that private schools are permitted stands as a tacit admission that public education is a threat to individual liberty." p. 43) He advocates a voucher-system of education where teachers sell their various wares in a competitive situation and are paid according to the number of vouchers that they manage to cash in. (pp.51-2 and p. 119) This model for education, which is advocated by Ivan Illich among others, stems from the works of the classical economists of the free market economy. In Book V of *The Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith argues for just such a school system in which state financial aid was to be limited to the provision of school buildings and not extended to paying teachers' wages lest "they become negligent and idle." Malthus in a letter to Whitbread, 1807, also felt that a private fee paid by all, even the poorest students, to their teacher would create in the latter "a stronger interest to increase the number of his pupils," thereby obliging him to avoid sloth. Bereiter dances to the same tune, but emphasizes the liberties to be defended: "It is to question whether the state has a duty, and consequently a right to infringe upon the liberty of its citizens in order to ensure that no children grow up in ignorance." (p. 39)

Bereiter's answer to this rhetorical question is an unabashed

"No!" As proof of the "terrible affront to individual liberty" (p. 39) which public education offers, he claims that we would never tolerate the compulsory education of adults in a democratic society. After all: "Even Hitler and Stalin [the Scylla and Charybdis of moral and political evil for "democrats" like Bereiter] did not try to make education compulsory for adults, although it seems certain that they would have done so if they had thought they could get away with it." (p.39) No. In its place Hitler and Stalin constructed either concentration camps or forced labor camps or both in order to "educate" or exterminate those adults whom they saw as posing a threat to their political power.

What all of this proves, however, is unclear, unless it is that Bereiter is implying that public education is a greater threat to individual liberty than dictators' camps. Should this seem far-fetched, we should not forget that Bereiter's name has been associated with that of Arthur Jensen in the past (in 1969 both men were leading participants in "The Toronto Symposium on Intelligence") and that in the present work he quotes from a 1970 study of Jensen's as "proof" of the intellectual inferiority of black children. (p. 60) Lest we be in any doubt as to where he stands on this issue, he concludes that "There are genuine differences in mental abilities that are relevant to the different scholastic performances of middle-class and lower-class children . . . it seems clear that they are not just an illusion created by the injustices of mental testing." (p. 61)

Moreover, Bereiter agrees with Christopher Jencks that: "Poor children, because of environmental conditions and possibly because of heredity, are lacking in some of the traits necessary for successful school learning." (p. 57) Not only do they lack intelligence but also the proper "interest, motivation and temperament" (p. 61) which school requires. The fault, then, lies not in the streaming of black and working class children into the worst, most overcrowded schools, nor in the racist and antiworking class nature of the methods used to justify such streaming, but in the children themselves. This is the classical method of "blaming the victim"\*\*\* as responsible for the deficiencies and injustices of both the school system and society as a whole. By locating "the problem" of school failure in the children themselves, victim-blamers, like Bereiter, then escape the moral problem of confronting the real injustices of our school system and can proceed with their missionary-type patchwork of creating a favorable learning environment for "underprivileged children" while remaining blind to the overall causes of the poverty

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\*\*\*See William Ryan's *Blaming the Victim*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1971, for an extensive analysis of this ideological stance.

of such children. One "solution" which Bereiter advances to the "problem" as he sees it, is to "license couples to have children." (pp. 44-5) While remaining vague about what the criteria would be in order to obtain such licenses, it is not hard to see that the proposal smacks of eugenics. After all, William Shockley has used Jensen's "evidence" to justify the sterilization of blacks with an I.Q. of below 100. He does, however, comply with Skinner and Bereiter's principle of positive reinforcement, since he proposes a reward of \$1,000 for each I.Q. point below 100 for those who agree to be sterilized! To be fair, Bereiter does not come out in support of Shockley's proposals, but he does leave the reader wondering exactly where he stands.

He does not leave us in any doubt about his other proposed solutions, however. In Part II, "Alternatives to Education," Bereiter advocates stricter streaming along class lines in order to create ". . . an adolescence caste system in which the brains go to school; in which the children of the upper middle class play, being confident of a good job when they feel ready; and in which the children of the poor haul stones. This is more or less what we have now, but mass education serves as something of a counterforce. A more distinctive set of options, on the other hand, might serve to strengthen social class divisions." (p. 122)

In fact, Bereiter believes that his proposals would have the opposite effect. How? He believes that only certain children should be permitted their adolescence (i.e. higher education) because the majority are fit for an immediate job or some sort of "service corps." Children then should be streamed in their early teens into the following:

1. *Liberal Studies*: "True education for a minority of students . . . within independent centers of higher learning like our better arts colleges and graduate schools . . . [which] can be relatively free of the dangers of imposing public values on individual learners." (pp. 114-5) By catering to a small elite, such institutions would avoid their present tendency to water down courses in order to accommodate the lowest common denominator.
2. *Unrestricted Adolescence*: A kind of free period, possibly supported by welfare, of "self-discovery" for the "majority of students who now go to college [and] are not academically oriented." (p. 115)
3. *Service Corps*: Designed largely for working class youth who would do service work for less than the minimum wage. Bereiter envisages bands of roving musicians on the subway, in the style of Mexican mariachis, guides to inform bewildered travelers of

the correct route to their destination and a sort of traveling social club at the end of certain subway cars where those who wished to talk to other passengers could do so. Their purpose? To improve the warmth and quality of life in such cities as Toronto. (p. 117)

4. *Vocational Training, Apprenticeship, On-the-Job Training, and Work*: Invoking a study by James Coleman, Bereiter proposes that public funds no longer be spent on vocational training but that private industry be made fully responsible for this aspect of "education." (p. 118-9) Since schools do such a bad job in training students in these fields, why not simply leave it to private enterprise to take up the slack, for they are much more likely to do an efficient job? Bereiter's rationale, then, once again is based on his rigorous defence of individual rights: "The marriage between the schoolhouse and the marketplace is not a happy one. By dissolving it we would free young people to find their way in the marketplace according to their own lights." (p. 119)

The children of the working class, then, would find themselves exposed to the realities of the job market at an early age, as they were one hundred years ago. But at least the freedom to sell their labor would be preserved, even if their right to publicly supported education had been taken away.

None of Bereiter's proposals would in fact dissolve the relationship between schools and the job market but would tend to intensify it. By restricting the use of public funds to the first two of his proposals, Bereiter would increase the gap between the access to power and privilege enjoyed by the rich and the poor. Working class children would be predominantly restricted to the Service Corps and Vocational Training while their middle- and upper-class counterparts would enjoy the luxury of university education or publicly supported "optional adolescence," as they sorted out their confused value-systems. Moreover, the very real problem of the quality of city life would hardly be solved by Bereiter's service corps suggestion. To anyone who has seen Mexico, his proposal that it be some sort of model in this area can only appear as a sick joke. Mariachis may be quaint, but they do little to help the problems of poverty and oppression experienced by the majority of Mexicans.

The insidious nature of Bereiter's book is due to his stated objective of defending individual liberty. In agreement with B. F. Skinner's notions in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* that the fundamental social problems facing mankind can be solved by "a change in behavior, not a fundamental change in people" (p. 127), Bereiter proposes changing the incentives that influence behavior. Through the positive reinforcement of socially acceptable behavior, social

conflict will be minimized, and people will apparently become free:

Changing behavior by changing incentives leaves the individual free. Education, without change in incentives, expects the individual to follow a new code against his self-interest. I think Skinner's behavioral engineering can only be appreciated if it is seen not as a perverse form of education but as an alternative to education. It calls for designing society so that behavior that is in the public interest is also in the individual's interest. Anything else is an unjust society that exploits people's self-sacrificing. (pp. 129-30)

Through behavioral conditioning, then, individuals' self-interest will be allied with their need, as members of society, to conform with the predominant rules of behavior governing society. In both Bereiter's and Skinner's accounts, these latter go unquestioned. Their presupposition appears to be that we, the general populace, can leave the matter of running society to those experts occupying positions of political power. After all, they will be the best persons equipped to do so, since they will be the best educated, if Bereiter has his way (actually, they will be the only ones to be "educated" in his sense). Thus, according to them both, we shall then live in a truly meritocratic society, based upon cognitive excellence. This false picture of how society does, and should, operate has been constantly questioned ever since it was first proposed, and here is not the place to refute it but simply to notice that it is highly questionable. The converse of it is the view of "social deviance" which we *have* questioned; namely, that the poor are themselves responsible for the position that they occupy in our society. At the basis of Bereiter's meritocratic view of society, moreover, is his false conception of freedom, according to which people can only be free in such a situation as exists in behavioral therapy, where there is no discussion of ends, but simply of means; that is, of the various techniques which the person in therapy can utilize in order to achieve the ends which he himself chooses. (pp. 33-4) This account not only ignores the dysfunctionality of needs which is felt by most, if not all people, but it denies the necessity of self-consciousness and self-reflection as necessary conditions for the possibility of achieving any form of freedom. *Praxis*, or the unification of thought and action, as Paulo Freire has so ably pointed out, can never be achieved by men whose needs are constantly overlooked by an oppressive class which denies them even the possibility of arriving at the words expressing their oppression. Bereiter's work will never help to achieve such an end.

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