

# Patterns of Educational Philosophy: Divergence and Convergence in Culturological Perspective



reviewed by [Maxine Greene](#) — 1971

**Title:** Patterns of Educational Philosophy: Divergence and Convergence in Culturological Perspective

**Author(s):** Theodore Brameld

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Many readers, like this reviewer, will approach Theodore Brameld's new book with rich recollections of the works that came before: the 1950 version of *Patterns; Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective*; and *Toward a Reconstructed Philosophy of Education*. Others will come on him afresh and may well discover a heartening radicalism in what he has to say. There are his or her private choosing. Nevertheless, the difference between his proposals and those made by Charles Silberman in the highly influential *Crisis in the Classroom* is considerable and ought to be confronted. The "open classroom" and related strategies belong to the progressive tradition; and Professor Brameld would call them "moderative," examples of a "later liberalism" no longer capable of coping with the rapidity of change. Silberman, it is true, blames "mindlessness" or lack of purpose for the ineffectuality of the schools; but he does not see the need for a cultural norm, nor for a new cultural design.

Explicitly goal-directed, unafraid of phrases like "group mind" and "defensible partiality," Brameld develops an intricate design for general education with as much stress on learning in the economic-political area as in the arts. The curriculum, marked by experiential involvement and a considerable degree of participation, is far more prescriptive than any of those being proposed by today's reformers. This is because Brameld is concerned to design a school which will transform the culture, a "community school considered, curriculum-wise, as both a centripetal and centrifugal force for cultural transformation." His ideas about federal aid and the establishment of an international as well as a federal educational authority are equally daring; but given the present situation where the federal government is concerned, I must say that I find his proposals respecting policy-making ringing a hollow sound.

It must be admitted, in any case, that *Patterns of Educational Philosophy* is not in the mainstream where philosophy of education *or* educational reform is concerned. Professor Brameld does (since he is aware of this) devote a few pages to contemporary movements, including existentialism, neo-Freudianism, neo-Marxism, philosophical analysis, Zen Buddhism, and a few others. Suggesting that, "by means of culturology," he can supersede sterile typologies, he defends his use of the four unfashionable categories by saying that, "although intended to embrace a good deal more than the institution of education as such," they "are interpreted precisely because they are both the products of and contributors to that institution." He is fairly vague about the ways in which

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contemporary movements can strengthen or weaken his "culturological perspectives," although he does attempt on occasion to weave in existential or analytic ideas.

Using Isaiah Berlin's metaphor of "the hedgehog and the fox," I would suggest that most philosophers of education have been foxy in the recent past. They have been wary of the "big thing," wary of systems and extravagant claims. Their concern has been largely for clarification of concepts or terms, although some (including this reviewer) have been drawn in the direction of an existential interest in subjectivity, consciousness, and individual choice. All this partly accounts for what Dr. Brameld may feel to be neglect of what has by now become a significant corpus of work.

As we have learned in the past few years, however, "the times they are a' changing"; and the call for cultural transformation may well be heeded by people whose trust is being gradually eroded, who are desperately in need of a commitment and a faith. I am more fearful than Dr. Brameld is about pressures from what Kierkegaard called "the crowd." I fear for the autonomy of the teacher, for the survival of the person in a depersonalized world. Proposals to strengthen an already overpowering system trouble me, as do prescriptiveness and talk of "cultural design." Nevertheless, and for all my disagreements, I recommend this book. It may outrage some and bore others; but its utopianism and commitment will hearten many. There is much to be challenged; there is much to be learned. Theodore Brameld is a man of high aspiration. Attention should be paid.

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