

In Search of Kazimierz Dabrowski

(This is the second installment of a three-part article on Kazimierz Dabrowski, the Polish developmental theorist and visiting professor in Alberta for over a decade who died last year after returning to Poland. The purpose of the article is to interest the reader in Dr. Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration.)

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We shall not be shipwrecked. Instead of the passage we are seeking, we may find oceans, to be fully explored by those who come after us; but if we are not prematurely capsized, if our constitutions can stand it, we shall make it. Nous y arriverons. Give me another ten years and I shall finish the neuroses and the new psychology . . .
Freud, in a letter to Wilhelm Fleiss

It is a very long way both geographically and culturally from Poland to the University of Alberta. Many people, perhaps especially Dr. Tom Nelson, must be credited with shortening that distance. Those individuals who laboured not only to bring Dr. Dabrowski to Alberta but who continued to battle for funds to support him during his stay, came from many differing psychological camps but they shared the common desire to take advantage of Dabrowski's rich experience and unique views.

There can be little doubt that Dabrowski's experience in Alberta was an extremely happy and productive one. Despite a generous Canada Council grant, Dabrowski's position at the University of Alberta was neither professionally nor financially secure until his appointment to the Faculte Saint-Jean only a year before his death. Yet he and his family appeared to live comfortably, entertaining frequently and well. While at the University, Dabrowski was involved to varying degrees with the Departments of Psychiatry, Psychology and Educational Psychology. He was also a visiting professor at the University of Laval in Quebec and, as often as possible, he returned to Poland, his beloved homeland; altogether a hectic schedule for a man well past retirement age.

Despite the considerable demands on his time and energy, it was at the University of Alberta that Kazimierz Dabrowski first began to define his conception of human development. The leap from practitioner to theorist is a gigantic one: extracting and refining hypotheses from a lifetime of experience demands an almost fanatical devotion, courage and self-discipline. Having the right working conditions doesn't hurt either! It must be kept in mind that, unlike most other visiting professors, Dr. Dabrowski had previously known little personal or professional freedom: he had not even been allowed to teach at the university in Poland. Praise must be given to Drs. Hague, Moss, Nelson and Rankel (among others) for providing that atmosphere of security and peace which enabled Dabrowski to unrestrainedly explore the implications of his theoretical conclusions about the nature of man.

Like Sigmund Freud, Dabrowski was a spellbinding and persuasive lecturer. Those people who truly met him were frequently shaken to their foundations by the encounter (Michael Piechowski completely abandoned a promising career in microbiology to become a student of Dabrowski and there were many others.) From all reports, Kazimierz Dabrowski was an aristocratic and dogmatic man, at one and the same time, warmly compelling and coolly reserved. Again like Freud, he needed to be surrounded by people to act as sounding-boards for his developing ideas and for the stimulation that only other well-disciplined and creative minds can produce. Dabrowski attracted a motley crew of followers—some genuine scholars more or less interested in his work and some disciples who seemed to have discovered in him some key to their own fulfillment. He casually referred to all such people as "friends" and he truly enjoyed them and freely used them. Nevertheless, the act of creation is an intensely lonely one: Dabrowski remained essentially private and aloof.

He went back to Poland in 1979 never again to return to Alberta. Dabrowski left behind, not only at the University of Alberta, but in both the Americas and Poland many scholars seriously interested in preserving his work and exploring its significance in related areas. Most recently, Dr. Nelson spearheaded the founding of a society which has, as one of its primary purposes, the consolidation of the contributions of Dabrowski and his many followers throughout the world.

It was my misfortune never to meet Dr. Kazimierz Dabrowski yet somehow I feel he would find the following quote from Freud's *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement* quite appropriate for describing his stay in Alberta: "It was a beautiful, heroic period; the splendid isolation was not devoid of advantages and charm."

Steps to Independence for People with Learning Disabilities is a booklet intended to help learning disabled adults become economically independent and reach their full potential. Contents include: definitions of different types of learning disabilities, ways to get professional diagnosis, ways to diagnose your own problems, ways that parents can help a learning disabled person be self-sufficient, steps to take to find a job. Available from Closer Look Parents Campaign for Handicapped Children and Youth, Box 1492, Washington, D.C. 20013.

Nursing Home Review Panel

In April, 1981 the Honourable D. Russell, Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care, appointed the Alberta Nursing Home Review Panel to assess the development of the nursing home system in Alberta; to compare the Alberta nursing home system with those in other provinces; to evaluate the structure, functioning and financing of nursing homes in Alberta; and report its findings and recommendations to the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care by March 31, 1982.

The Chairman of the panel is Dr. Harry Hyde of Edmonton. The members are Mrs. Barbara DeSutter, Calgary; Mr. Sybren Vandermeulen, Edmonton; Mrs. Patricia Weatherup, Lethbridge; Mr. Kevin Taft, Edmonton; Mr. MacGregor Duffield, Innisfail; and Sister Jean Golden, Calgary. The secretary of the panel is Mrs. Joyce Falston, and the office address is 7th Floor, HYS Centre, 11010 - 101 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 2P4. Ph: 427-4105.

Long Term Care for the Elderly

From *Senior Citizen's Bureau Fact Sheet*. Alberta Social Services and Community Health, July 1981

A literature review on long term care for the elderly was conducted by Karel Bennett as a PEP project for the Research and Strategic Planning Branch of Alberta Hospitals and Medical Care. The paper is called "Long Term Care for the Elderly: Issues and Alternative—A Literature Review". Chapter I discusses several definitions of long term care presented in the literature. Chapter II explores the projected impact of the elderly on the long term care system in Alberta by examining future population trends; the age structure of the elderly population; and the age structure of the institutional population in the province. Chapter III discusses problems in the long term care delivery system identified through a literature review, and Chapter IV summarizes recommendations suggested in the literature for improving the long term care delivery system. Copies of the paper are available from the Senior Citizens Bureau, 2nd Floor Seventh Street Plaza, 10030 -107 Street, Edmonton, T5J 3C4, phone 427-7876.