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General Education and Specialization: Are They Meeting the Needs of Society? Panel Discussion

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My immediate reaction to that question is "No." The needs of society will best be met when the needs of all its members are being met. Statistics like the following indicate to me that the educational needs of a large portion of society's members are not being met:

A. More than one in five children drop out of school prior to graduation from high school (Parnell, 1969; Vern, 1968).

B. Only one of every ten children graduates from a four-year college (Parnell, 1969).

C. We now have a surplus of college graduates in almost every field (Time, 1971).

Following are some of the reasons I believe general education is failing to adequately meet the needs of society:

I. Overspecialization or fragmented specialties.
   In many cases, general education consists of a series of specialized,
departmentalized courses. Surely the student's education is general in that it exposes him to many different disciplines. But he may wind up with fragmented bits and pieces of information that seemingly have no relationship to each other or to his life.

I can recall how I used to hate history—in high school and in college. In both instances, I memorized enough "facts" to pass the exams. But, the instructor never seemed interested in teaching whatever was in the past that would shed light on the present culture and contemporary needs. We never examined the causes of World War I in light of present-day conditions; nor did we talk about the influences of the war on present-day life styles.

Unfortunately, teaching in the disciplines may be even more specialized than the discipline itself. Some professors tend to become preoccupied with a specific aspect of their disciplines which may or may not be relevant to the main problems of their field.

Overspecialization may be creating rather than solving problems of society. Some of the problems brought on by technological changes may be due, in part, to the scientist whose achievements are compromised by his blindness to the ethical and aesthetic consequences of his work.

II. Research and publications vs. teaching.

To become a college teacher, one need only do a piece of specialized research. As Becker (1971) noted, the Ph.D. recruitment program does not concern itself with a candidate's teaching ability, even though the person who receives the degree is certified as the "highest teacher in the land" (a university teacher). He likens the absurdity of this to giving medical degrees to those who do research in the medical sciences and then certifying them to do surgery. "Doctors can be sued for malpractice while professors cannot. The flesh is then more sacred than the soul" (p. 205).

It is ironical that the undergraduate students are the ones who wind up with teaching assistants for their instructors. They usually have little or no access to the "giants" in the fields. Becker (1971) said the "giants" spend their time "jetting around the world to national and international meetings and giving papers furthering their own prestige and careers" (p. 205).

III. Overreaction or crisis orientation.

Our educational process has frequently appeared crisis-oriented. At one point in history, the most critical need was the knowhow to produce food and fiber in such a fashion that manpower could be shunted into industrial production. In response to this need, land grant colleges were established (Morrill Act of 1862). As a result, today we have an agriculture that according to most standards is overly
successful—one farmer can now feed more than forty additional persons—and is creating problems of subsidies instead of deficiencies.

In more recent times, i.e., after Sputnik, it became important as a national objective to boost our science and technology programs. Probably the most obvious display of the success of this effort was a color telecast of man exploring the surface of the moon. But, just as agriculture overshot its mark in the production of foodstuffs, the science and technology obsession overshot its mark in the production of engineers and science-related Ph.D.'s.

Education Commissioner Marland and others state that the present crisis is the demand for vocational and technical services. And, unless we keep in mind the diversity of the needs of society and those of the individual, we will again overshoot our mark and not achieve the proper balance in our educational programs.

IV. Schooling for more schooling.

Grant Venn (1970) in *Man, Education and Manpower* says we are quite successful in preparing children for more schooling. Elementary subjects are taught to prepare children for middle school; middle school students must take the prerequisite courses for high school; and high school students prepare for college. And so it continues even at the college level. Undergraduate departments measure their success by the number and quality of the undergraduates they send into graduate departments and graduate departments measure their success by research and publications. Regrettfully, the type of publications and research that graduate schools reward may not be intended to apply to contemporary cultural needs, but to satisfy the numbers game of publish or perish.

Gengerelli (1969), a UCLA psychologist said the purpose of education is to create a citizenry that is capable of supplying the entire spectrum of the needs of society. And, a modern industrial society such as ours needs poets as well as machinists, and philosophers as well as executives. However, our present educational system does not take note of the diversity of society's needs nor the diversity of students. Most students are expected to learn basically the same knowledge, although at different rates, and derive the same conclusions.

Thus, education has become too narrowly defined. The concept must be broadened to include the development of human potential. One writer states it this way (Russell, 1971, p. 593): “Since a person's potential is unique within himself, education for each individual is unique. . . . Any attempt to direct all individuals into the same or similar educational tracks limits their potential” and that of society.

Yet track students, we have. Even though only about ten percent of our students complete college, the majority of the curriculum is set up to meet their needs while ignoring those of the non-baccalaureate
student. And, high schools continue to measure success by the percentage of their students who attend college.

FAIS, the Fusion of Applied and Intellectual Skills (a research project which I direct at the University of Florida's Laboratory School) seeks to remedy this situation by providing opportunities for all children to learn about and participate in the world of work as a part of their general education program.

One of the assumptions of the Project is that the final difference among people relates more to their values and feelings than to their knowledge or skills. A man's values determine what he supports, promotes, and strives for or against. It follows that the career choices an individual makes, the way one performs on the job, even the decision to "drop out," are functions of personal values. Therefore, world of work values become the central elements of the process of career development; namely that which leads the child to determine for himself how he will relate to and express himself in a career.

Since value development begins early in life, our first-year emphasis was on kindergarten through fifth grades. This past year we developed a curriculum which focused more on the affective dimension of man and work. We wanted this age child to discover how individuals felt about their jobs, the value workers placed on their labor, the relationship of the nature of one's work to his life away from the job; in short, the role of work in the totality of a person's life.

Early last year, we ferreted from the literature ten assumptions about man and work. These are:

1. Man works for reasons in addition to that of earning a living.
2. A person's interests and needs may be satisfied by many work roles.
3. Vocational choice confronts each and every individual and is not the unique problem of a special group or minority.
4. Career development is a lifelong process.
5. Most facets of a person's life are shaped or directly affected by his work role.
6. People are unique and cannot be stereotyped according to their occupations.
7. Jobs do not exist in isolation—people are interdependent.
8. The status of an occupation does not indicate its worth to society.
9. If man is to influence the degree and kind of change within our society, he must understand technology and its implications.
10. Work roles for some may be leisure time activities for others.

These are not viewed as absolute truths to be taught and subsequently memorized by students. Instead, they are approached as hypotheses to be tested at the different levels of schooling and fused into the different curriculum subjects.
The activities we developed consisted of three elements. First the child gathered data relative to one of the ten hypotheses, acted on the data; e.g., drawing conclusions, making comparisons, etc.; and then reacted on a subjective level to that which he had learned about the world of work. His reaction served as a springboard for non-directive clarifying questioning. (See Appendix for a sample activity.) It is our hope that this process will move a child from simply knowing about the world of work to knowing how he wants to relate to that world. In this scheme, knowledge is not an end in itself.

In addition to the activities, we developed a "Teacher Guide," an "Occupational Sequence Framework," an inservice program, and five evaluation instruments.

The "Occupational Sequence Framework" is a suggested sequence of occupations through which children may progress beginning at the K level and ending after fifth grade. Placement of an occupation on the chart was based on the developmental and interest levels of the child as determined by interviews and the literature on child development and psychology.

The primary aspects of the inservice program consist of working with teachers in clarifying their values and goals and in aiding children in this process.

Three of the evaluation instruments were developed to determine and measure change in teachers', K-2 students', and 3-5 students' attitudes relative to including occupational information in the curriculum. And, the fifth instrument, called the Educational Goals Preference Scale, was developed to register change in teachers' rankings of relevant goals in American education as a result of participating in our summer workshops.

All the K-5 materials are presently being field-tested in three counties in the state of Florida. While this is going on we are involved in the developmental stages of a program which builds on the K-5 program for 6-8th graders. Eventually we hope to have completed a K-12 career education program.

If we are successful in our efforts to fuse concepts about man and work into the general education program, all students who leave high school will do so with more knowledge about their potential and roles within which their potential may be maximized.

The human potentials movement seeks to enable every individual to find the role in life within which he can live and work most creatively and productively. FAIS is a part of the Human Potentials Movement.
APPENDIX

PURPOSE:
This activity asks children to generate alternative hypotheses to proposed solutions concerning the effects of technological change upon people's lifestyles and work roles.

PROCEDURE:
Initiate a discussion concerning the effect of industrialization and technology upon environment. After a majority of students have voiced opinions concerning the effects of pollution, introduce the information about Saltville (or a more local, but similar, situation), emphasizing the totality of the situation upon the community involved.
After presenting the situation and the government's solution, aid the children in generating alternate solutions, and engage in a general classroom discussion of the effects of their solutions. (It may be necessary to assist the children in becoming aware of the total involvement of the community and its source of being—the factory.)
Note: Possible areas of discussion could include:
1. Maintain the existing solution—environment is more important than people.
2. Fund re-education of all the workers and establish some form of new skill. (Is this merely "make-work," or could any work be important as the old factory?)
3. Require the factory owners to bring in new industry.
4. Build a new town near a "clean" factory.
5. Financially support workers whether employer or not.
Suggest reaction questions: How would you feel about this if it were your town? How would your parents feel? Would you willingly give up your home, friends, and school if told to do so by the government? When industry builds a factory and a town do you think they should care for the people who live in the town (the factory workers)?

RESOURCE MATERIALS:
Life, March 26, 1971, pp. 36-46, Vol. 70, Number 11.

RELATED ACTIVITIES:
Have the children role play a "lifestyle" for several days; then, when they have established firm roles, tell them that an impending disaster (flood, earthquake, forest fire, etc.) is forcing them to move to an entirely different kind of country where they have no work, no homes, no friends. Discuss their feelings concerning the change in their lives.
Discuss how they would feel if they were forced to move to an unknown country (as did the Pilgrims, etc.).

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Do general education and specialized education meet the needs of contemporary society? It is easier to evaluate specialized education. As to general education, we must first ask ourselves pertinent questions, such as "What are we actually expecting general and liberal education to do?"

There seems to be a general consensus that it should provide the student with knowledge and a philosophy that will make his life meaningful, and that it should also provide a more practical and helpful training in linking various academic disciplines and providing a broader approach to an issue. Specifically, this latter function is the practical and useful side of learning, i.e., knowledge of information, whereas the former is to gain knowledge for awareness and making the individual more insightful. In other words, if the individual undergoing such education becomes not only "well instructed" but "well educated" (a distinction made in French and other languages), and if he can synthesize all his learning in such a way as to make it relevant to his life and
his work and becomes a better human being, then we can say that general education is meeting the needs of society.

We are aware that in the traditional universities the students were able to spend a considerable amount of time to acquire the art of living through liberal arts education. But such "luxury" cannot be afforded today because of the heavy learning program of special fields. Today's general education must supplement specialization by offering a broader understanding of related fields. When the above-mentioned goals are met, we can say that general education is meeting the needs of society.

In this day of highly specialized knowledge, a very popular approach is the so-called "interdisciplinary" one. But it often tends to be not much more than merely gathering a number of specialists to deal with an issue. In case the interdisciplinary action is not "integrated," the outcome may be a disappointing one. Generally, people somehow look up to a "specialist" with awe, as the term technocrat suggests. An illustrative example is the medical profession. Would three or four specialists without a generalist, an internal medicine person, be adequate in dealing with a patient?

Likewise, the fashionable thing to do nowadays for the management of a company planning expansion in a foreign country, for example, is to call in a team of specialists: an international lawyer, a political scientist, an economist, perhaps a marketing specialist, an architect, etc., each specialized in his own field. Each one is expected to contribute knowledge from his field of specialization, and the result of their contributions is somehow expected to be more complete and larger than the sum total. In reality, however, the area or areas which were overlooked may cause the plan to fail unexpectedly. Some overlapping of knowledge is essential for any interdisciplinary solution or planning effort.

An interesting case of failure in spite of well-intended planning was the Niger Project, as reported by Peter Hammond.* The management provided an assimilated environment for the Mossi workers by setting up dwelling units in the manner of their tribal society's village layout. The management accordingly hoped that the change to which the Mossi laborers would have to adjust would be kept to a minimum, so that their degree of commitment would be strong and their productivity would be high. Although this was a rather commendable effort on the part of management, it did not produce the desired effects. A more complete understanding of the Mossi interaction patterns and social system would have precluded the failure. The Mossi communities, as in

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other primitive and peasant societies, had traditional multiple social bonds, which Gluckman calls “multiplex relations” with one another. The Mossi laborers, therefore, were not familiar with or accustomed to the behavioral pattern of differentiated societies brought about by changes in the economic system such as monetization of economic transactions, wage labor, and the market of agricultural products. Thus, being unfamiliar with the behavioral pattern of holding roles separately with respect to different sets of people, it was very difficult to interact with neighbors who were unrelated by lineage. In the village each lineage lived in a compound residence enclosed by a wall, but in the Niger Project neighbors were unrelated by lineage and in fact were strangers. That is, they could not play the role of neighbors to strangers who were housed as kinsmen. At home, moreover, the system of authority within such compound dwellings was based on kinship, but at the Project such a culturally sanctioned method of resolution was absent. Hence they socially withdrew from neighbors in order to avoid conflict. Yet such behavior, social withdrawal, meant the failure of the traditional norm of a good neighbor. In short, in the Niger Project the tribal system of interpersonal relationships negatively affected the development of industrialization and resulted in a low industrial commitment. A little more general knowledge outside the special fields of the participating specialists, or the inclusion of a knowledgeable generalist on the team, might have prevented the costly error and resulted in a successful transition, such as was the case of Buganda (of East Africa) and of Cantel, a Guatemalan peasant community. Although some cases of successful transition have been achieved accidentally, there is no reason why a planned change cannot be more successful.

A need for generalists is quite evident, but who are they? In this world of vast knowledge, is it impossible for anyone to acquire knowledge of everything to be a true generalist. However, it is attainable for one to be a generalist in a broader area of specialization. The generalist in the medical profession in this sense would be an internal medicine doctor who is actually a specialist but may also be regarded as a generalist. We can do two things. We can (1) train some specialists called “generalists” whose broad knowledge would be most useful in coordinating various disciplines. The future may indeed prove that such “generalists” are needed. At the same time, we can also (2) offer good education in such a way as to provide those who are going to be specialists (in a very narrow field) to have some knowledge that is related to their areas of interest so that they can at least be “intelligent” about various peripheral fields of relevance and thus be able to have a broad perspective.

Let us look for a moment at the type of people some traditional Japanese universities used to produce: well-rounded, “cultured,” and able to make their life meaningful, i.e., knowing the art of living. The
liberal arts education which provided this sort of personality growth is likely to be considered by today's Japanese youth as "irrelevant" and impractical or "too academic." However, the absence of such a seemingly wasteful education may be seen in the contrast between the old-system university graduates and the graduates of the new educational system which came into being as a result of the Allied Occupation after World War II. Granted that the pre-World War II graduates chose that education when it was easier to choose a military career, let alone that they were subjected to the oppression of a powerful military clique. Consequently there may have been something special about them to start with. Granted also that it was a highly selective elite education. However, it does seem to have produced a very impressive class of graduates. The examination of literature as well as personal observation of them indicates that they were, generally speaking, capable of meeting any new situation with confidence and poise far beyond what their difference in age or the length of their education would suggest. Moreover, they were quite able to establish what Carl Rogers calls "trusting relationships" with others. They themselves often talked about "those fine three years at higher school" (immediately preceding entrance in a university) with nostalgia and attributed to it the formation of their personality and attitudes. With regard to interpersonal relationships in particular, there is a clear indication that the graduates of the new system of colleges and universities seem to have difficulties. Japan's young people today seem to be rather confused and the normative system is not well integrated. Although this may be a worldwide phenomenon, and therefore cannot be blamed simply on the absence of an effective educational system or the absence of general education, we cannot ignore the importance of good education, especially in the area of general and liberal education for personality growth.

Technologically man has made enormous progress in recent centuries. However, when it comes to interpersonal relationships, we do not seem to have made any advancement for centuries. In fact, people seem to have gotten along with each other much better in former days. We have, to be sure, learned much in the behavioral science fields, but in spite of our knowledge we are not obtaining much practical benefit from it. We should give more careful thought to this matter, and perhaps a new and broader approach is necessary if people are to get along better with each other.

One of the new approaches is to free ourselves from a narrow specialization and look at ourselves from a broader perspective. I believe that a good general and liberal education would enable us to free ourselves from a conventional approach to social life. With a more liberal approach to social life we will be able to acknowledge that the differences between other animals and human beings are essentially a matter
of degree, for we are a part of the animal kingdom rather than special beings. We should be open-minded and recognize that we can learn much from studying the behavior of other animals. Although studies of other animals may not be directly applicable to all aspects of human behavior, they could provide insights and point out possible areas of research and hypotheses concerning human behavior.

A few years ago the Royal Society of London sponsored a symposium, the first in 150 years. The topic of the symposium was "Ritualization of Behavior in Animals and Man." The result was very impressive, to say the least. Quite appropriately, the general organizer was Julian Huxley. His background as a generalist was invaluable in putting together the findings of the noted scholars of various academic disciplines, among whom were, to mention a few, E. R. Leach, M. Fortes, R. D. Laing, Erik Erikson, N. Tinbergen and Konrad Lorenz. There is much to be learned from this symposium and others of a similar nature for a better understanding of man and his behavior toward others. Through an open-minded and broad approach we might be able to develop a deeper insight of the difficulties of contemporary society. Inter- as well as intra-group conflicts are so frequent that we cannot even be certain of our collective survival. To reduce this danger, we ought to pay more attention to the process of "pseudo speciation" that Erik Erikson talks about. To say that "Human beings are all one specie" does not assure us of internal harmony. In fact, this could be misleading, since some insist on using one yardstick to measure such characteristics of other groups as intelligence, morality, etc. They say, "We are all alike and therefore the same standard should apply. And, anyone who is not like me means inferior indeed."* By understanding the "pseudo speciation" process we can free ourselves from the habit of placing people on vertical scales. It would also become more natural for us to accept the concept of being different without the necessity of a superior-inferior continuum.

Reviewing the symposium, we discover the important stabilizing functions of rituals, especially social rituals. In the changing societies we should perhaps recognize the need for developing new rituals to replace those which have become merely survivals. Rituals should be seen in their own light as a mechanism responding to various situations. We should be able to see more clearly the confusion of today's norms, particularly with regard to those regulating mechanisms of interpersonal relationships. It might give us new insights to rediscover

the functions of rituals, i.e., facilitating communication, providing intra-group bonds and minimizing inter-group conflicts. We would then perhaps understand what makes the human being a very exceptional animal, especially with regard to his propensity to kill members of his own group. We usually attribute uniqueness to the more positive qualities of man, such as his capacity for artistic creation, etc. Are the negative qualities necessary counterparts of our positive qualities? John N. Bleitreu’s *The Parables of the Beast* is another good example of the generalist’s approach to the study of life. We can look at ourselves with a more educated approach with dignity and humbleness, and less obsessed with various “hang ups” of man as a being apart from the animal world. If general education is to be successful, then, a person should be educated and reasonable enough to learn from all possible sources.

Considering the real danger of a possible holocaust, we should keep in mind that it is not the advancement of technological knowledge that will save mankind from destroying itself. On the contrary, it is the understanding of ourselves that is the key to human survival. General and liberal study should help each person to acquire this human insight. He will as a result be able to make knowledge relevant to himself and to his relationships with others. If we hear some students complaining that what they study in college is irrelevant, perhaps it is because we are failing to give them a good enough general education that equips them with the ability to make all information relevant. After all, that is what a “well educated” and thus well-adjusted person can do: systematically adapt each piece of knowledge to an integrated whole which in turn will make his life meaningful. General education should provide the student with the mental ability and the art of making the final outcome greater than the sum total of what he has learned from various academic disciplines. That capability in turn should contribute toward the well-being of society. As long as general education does not provide, or the student refuses to learn, the very human quality of how to live harmoniously with other human beings, I would say that general and liberal education is not meeting the needs of society.