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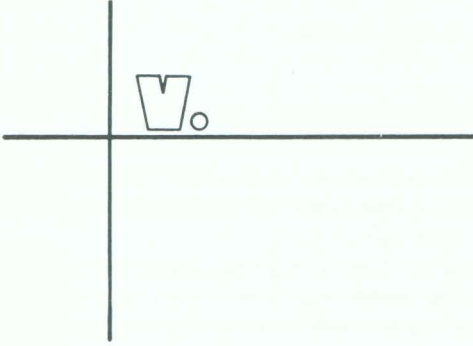
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## Developing Relationships Between Two-Year and Four-Year Colleges

By RICHARD E. WILSON

This is a time of crisis, a crisis of immediate and direct concern to us—to all people who are interested in general education, in liberal learning, in educating people for a free society, and in the development of liberated, liberal, humane persons.

Examples of the need for such people are all around us: the Watergate, the resignation of Spiro Agnew, the Mideast War, the conflicting stories regarding the energy crisis, the environment, the food supply, the state of the economy, and monetary policy, to mention but a few.

One obvious consequence of all this is a growing national cynicism—an almost total disbelief in what our officials assert and vow. For example, for years my Mother contended that all politicians were crooks—but even she would back off far enough to say that her governor, Otto Kerner, was an honest man. Of course that was before he was convicted of taking a payoff from racing track people.

More to the point are the recent national polls that reveal only one-third of the people believe President Nixon is doing a satisfactory job. And what about former Vice-President Agnew—the law-and-order, the-press-is-the-villain man? And let's not forget the Democrats' most recent presidential aspirant, Senator McGovern. His 1,000% statement is a classic. This reminds me of Art Buchwald's excellent presentation last October to the American Council on Education. He

reduced the choice between Nixon and McGovern to this example: Nixon was the man you were afraid to buy a used car from, and McGovern was the man who looked like he had bought one. Again recalling Buchwald's presentation, he said that McGovern wanted to run for the presidency in the worst way—and he did.

Relating this to our profession, at times it seems as if we want to teach students in the worst way—and we do.

What is so disheartening about these events is that people in high places seemingly have not comprehended the depths of our frustration, dismay and disbelief. An example of this occurred when Gerald Ford was put forth as the President's choice for the vice presidency. An editorial in the Washington Post newspaper on Sunday, October 14, accurately summed up the feelings of many people:

You would not have known from the festive glitter and spirit of "fun" in the East Room that the President was announcing his choice for the 40th Vice President of the United States because the man he had twice chosen to be the 39th Vice President had two days earlier left the office in disgrace and been convicted of a felony. You would not have known that this was only the latest evidence of corruption in high places and of a cynical breach of public trust to which a benumbed electorate had been treated over many months. Again, you would not have known that the somber duty of the President, confronted with a crisis of confidence in government, was to offer a candidate for consideration of both houses of Congress—not to preside over a ceremony combining the more synthetic elements of a political convention with the trappings of a state occasion at least worthy of the ruling house of Ruritania. And finally, you would not have guessed from the quick and automatic effusions of legislators in both parties that the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, which authorizes the President to fill vice-presidential vacancies, also imposes upon Congress a heavy responsibility for subjecting his choice to serious, sustained scrutiny by way of introducing some measure of public participation in a decision of such enormous potential consequence . . .

There is nothing laudable or uplifting about this congressional response. What makes it the more dispiriting is the near certainty that it was precisely in anticipation of such a self-serving, conventional and narrowly political response that the President made his choice. So cynicism is compounded. We are back where we began.

But enough of the crisis of confidence. I suspect all of us have either seen Jeb McGruder testify at the Watergate hearings or read about his reference to his liberal education. We know that *our* institutions, that *our* work are also suspect—that educators have also fallen

from grace. We know that most people view us with suspicion. They know we are human and, therefore, capable of being selfish, materialistic and self-serving. Mr. Chips is a character that died long ago and the new stereotypes have us working less and making more, corrupting our young charges with notions of revolution and violence, and generally biting the hand of the society that feeds us. So what are we going to do about it?

I suggest we become a part of our communities and abandon, at least in part, our islands of academe and any foolish notions of superiority we may still have.

And a good starting place is in the more than 1,100 community colleges scattered around the country: colleges presently enrolling about 3,000,000 people; colleges that constitute the membership of AACJC; colleges that still lead the nation in rate of enrollment growth.

### *THESES*

I propose the following theses:

- (1) General education—the need for it in a democratic society and for our own personal growth—is recapturing interest and support, especially among older adults.
- (2) Older adults can more easily relate to problem-focused curricula or thematic, whole approaches in general education. Disciplines are too theoretical and unrelated to their world and their concerns.
- (3) Community colleges provide the best vehicle—the best delivery system, if you prefer the contemporary vernacular—for fulfilling the general education function at the post-secondary level.
- (4) Other colleges and universities—the so-called senior institutions—are best equipped and positioned to assure the success and continued support of general education by providing essential resources (most notably human resources) and by complementing the activities of community colleges.
- (5) State agencies, such as coordinating or governing boards of higher education, will insure cooperative efforts among all types of colleges by making critical decisions whenever colleges fail to reach agreement on a division of labor and responsibilities.

In support of these theses, I put forth the following observations—some supported by well-known evidence, others by personal experiences. (And, happily for me, many by Dr. Hodgkinson's keynote remarks.)

### *OBSERVATIONS*

- (1) Older adults are increasingly interested in education—all kinds of education, e.g., technical courses to advance their careers,



how-to-do-it courses to get the job done right and save money in the process, avocational courses to make more enjoyable use of leisure time, and general education to have a better understanding of "what in the hell is going on," both privately and publicly. They are concerned, they have not given up hope, and they aim to change things—if they can only figure out how. They enroll as part-time students. I estimate that half of the community college enrollment is part-time students. They are older: several community colleges report average ages of 26 to 28.

- (2) According to Professor Malcolm S. Knowles of Boston University, older adults are more self-directive, are themselves rich resources for learning, are interested in improving their social roles, want to apply what they learn to real problems right now. Furthermore, we know that older adult part-time students prefer to participate in educational activities of a short duration close to home—the closer the better. It is difficult, if not impossible, for them to travel long distances and devote several days to an educational program. One exception would be if it's part of their job—but that type of educational program is not our immediate concern.
- (3) If we accept Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and our own common sense for that matter, we observe that older adults are more persistent and successful students. They have worked and demonstrated to themselves that they can produce. As a group this has undoubtedly affected their feelings of self-esteem positively. They have experienced the admiration and respect of others. They are psychologically ready for general education; they recognize the immediate and long-term values of it; and they are prepared to spend the necessary time with a high expectation of comprehending and applying the assignments.
- (4) Enrollments in colleges have tapered off considerably. As Hodgkinson noted, there is an absolute decline of 17-year-olds starting in 1980. During the last three years, a diminishing rate of high school grads have matriculated to colleges and many of those as part-time students. The only other population that can purchase our offerings is the older-adult group.
- (5) Community colleges are still growing in numbers and enrollments. In several states 90% of the people are within easy commuting distance of a community college. Community colleges are becoming more community-based. They look to their communities for guidance in deciding what programs to offer and where to offer them. They are less and less campus bound. The idea of consumerism is not foreign or offensive to community college people—they really aim to please. In short, community colleges as a national movement are ideally located, philosophically

grounded, and psychologically prepared to meet local needs for general education. (I can also add that there are many political and economic realists in the community college field who recognize that this is something that will be done, either by community colleges or some other institution.)

- (6) On the other hand, baccalaureate and graduate degree granting colleges and universities as a group have been experiencing enrollment stability. They are not as strategically located as community colleges. Furthermore, they are not nearly so community based—given the same definition used for community colleges. Their interests are broader, and rightly so. But they do have a great deal of human talent and other resources that can be invaluable in both developing and implementing general education programs. The coupling of the two types of institutions—community college presenting and managing the programs, and other colleges and universities participating in the development and staffing of the general education programs—could provide an unbeatable combination. From my somewhat biased viewpoint, it looks like a winner—a design that could satisfy the older adult consumer, the community college teacher, the university professor, and the cost-conscious state politician. (Please note that I am not suggesting senior colleges and universities abandon their general education concerns for their regular on-campus students. That is another issue—an internal matter, in my judgment.)
- (7) Unless you've been asleep for the past five years, you will have noted a steady encroachment of state control over higher education. The trend is obvious and there are presently no perceptible and strong counter trends. I believe the states will continue to accept responsibility for general education and increasingly so for adult part-time students. But state officials despise duplication of services and they will continually tighten the choke on the budget to reduce overlap and competition.
- (8) A final observation, and this one is perhaps the most controversial and devastating to us and other people interested in general education. There is a widespread view that general or liberal education has been worse than ineffectual—that it has in fact undermined the democratic society it was intended to perpetuate. An excellent statement of this view appears in the Summer issue of *Change Magazine*. On page 50 the British sociologist, Stanislaw Andreski, states:

Every human society has had elaborate customs and institutions which were effective in instilling into the young the sentiments necessary for its perpetuation. Now for the first time in recorded history Western Capitalism offers us

a spectacle of a system which not only has given us altogether the task of moral education but actually employs vast resources and the means of persuasion of unprecedented power to extirpate the customs, norms and ideals indispensable for its survival, and to inculcate fundamentally anti-social attitudes which are incompatible with any conceivable social order. It would be miraculous if a social order which permits such massive antisocialization could fail to destroy itself.

Addressing the same concerns, the Carnegie Report entitled *The Purposes and the Performance of Higher Education in the United States* points out that a survey of faculty revealed the following responses that could be interpreted as antisocial:

Twenty-seven per cent disagreed with: "In the U.S.A. today there can be no justification for using violence to achieve political goals."

Twenty-two per cent agreed with: "Faculty members should be free on campus to advocate violent resistance to public authority."

Thirty-three per cent agreed with: "Meaningful social change cannot be achieved through traditional American politics."

I mentioned this last observation to underline two points. Cynicism is a real threat and it should be offset, at least in part, through general education. But, and this is the second point, can the institution that is normally expected to support the society and offset feelings of cynicism and alienation—can higher education be trusted with the job?

Personally I'm convinced we can do the job and do it well. Furthermore, I think the community colleges have stayed close to their constituencies, have retained their supportive roles, and have relied on constructive criticism to improve things. I have detected frustration in community colleges, but it is usually a consequence of impatience, not enough money, and too much to be done in too little time. Cynics are few and far between in community colleges. All of which adds up to another reason for entrusting the role of providing general education for older adults to community colleges.

Before I conclude my remarks, I want to mention a few issues that are normally raised—issues that strike me as being red herrings.

- (1) General education is really for everyone—not at the same point in life because interests and circumstances vary. People can learn. They can learn a great deal more than we frequently expect. Benjamin Bloom has stated the case well in his excellent monograph, "Learning for Mastery," and Hodgkinson made the same point in his remarks.
- (2) It is easy to get overly concerned with means—such as the audio-



tutorial approach, non-traditional instruction and the cluster college concept—and ignore ends. There is no best means or methodology for all learners—a variety, a mix is needed. But, if you don't have clearly understood ends—and that could simply be student satisfaction—the choice of means is immaterial.

- (3) The distinction between cognitive and affective learning is a simplistic duality. They occur simultaneously, they are interdependent, and, except for conceptual purposes, they are inseparable.

There is one other issue that persistently crops up whenever representatives of different kinds of post-secondary institutions meet together. And of course I'm referring to the transfer of credits—to articulation—to inter-institutional mobility. This is one of those knotty problems that defies generalization and solution for all time. In many ways it is an illogical problem—it requires the relating of two unknowns with an arbitrary number of dubious significance. Were it not for our involvement in the credentialing and screening of students, we would call it much ado about nothing. (Also funding is based on this.)

But we are stuck with the so-called system and we must make the best of it. Nationally the trend is toward easier articulation and various devices—such as AACJC's servicemen's opportunity college idea—are being implemented to allow easy transferability of credits. Since it is basically an illogical situation, political and economic arguments can frequently win concessions that logic and reasonableness could never achieve. For example, a few state agencies have mandated articulation procedures and standards. Logically, Tarrant County Community College used its clout producing enrollment figures—which can easily be translated into dollars and cents—to convince nearby universities that they should be more friendly and understanding. Personally, I think one argument is as good as another and I'm inclined to place the burden of proof on the institution evaluating the transcript. If a college cannot explain in specific terms what a student must have in order to get the credit, it has no reasonable basis for not accepting the credit.

In summary, let me state my firm conviction that the heyday of general education is coming—thanks to life-long education becoming a reality. I see all colleges working together to provide this function—the community colleges serving as the delivery systems and the senior colleges providing specialized support and resources. It will not happen overnight or easily. The development will be uneven and the arrangements will vary from state to state.

But it's something that must be done and it's something that we should do together.

