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Raymond Kolcaba
Cuyahoga Community College

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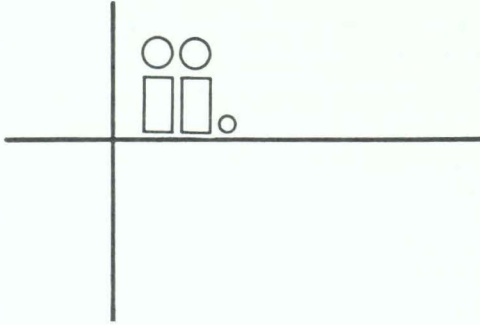
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General Education As An Alternative To Liberal Education

By RAYMOND KOLCABA

At the Eastern Campus of Cuyahoga Community College, the campus community as a whole has taken seriously the district-wide commitment to general education. Rather than spell out the nature of general education, the campus president left the concept open-ended and invited faculty to discover its meaning through their own experiments and innovative efforts.

Issues shrouding the role of schools are at times distilled into two views. Either schools train students in conformity with ordinary life patterns of society or they promote the personal growth of students without an eye to those patterns. The former has been criticized as unwarrantedly narrowing, perhaps, turning out persons as wheel cogs or interchangeable parts for the societal machine. The latter has been criticized as promoting the development of persons incompetent in ordinary survival skills, such that, an excruciating life of reality therapy is required to undo the damage. Of course the "either-or" delineation of issues on a complex subject is suspect. The optimum would be to view each position in fresh perspective by addressing them quite late in development of a new approach. The present thesis is the beginning of such an approach.

The orientation and commitment of the present work is to view schools as nurturing individuals. Full personhood is assumed as deriving from growth activities where the individual is respected as an autonomous person. Such persons are aided in unfolding where institutional dependencies are minimized. A person's optimum basis for living and survival is rooted in an articulated value system discovered by the individual and central to structuring school and all other activities. The meld of individual

values and current social realities are grounded in activities joining the two where role and position are comprehended between them. Action in accordance with a value system is a commitment, an identity commitment, to it, and given that the system is freely chosen, places responsibility upon the individual for those values and the life they promise in contemporary society. Such a picture of the individual lurks behind the scenes of what follows.

The climate at Eastern encouraged interactions of experience that crossed the barriers of traditional curriculum development. As a result, the present paper is in part an extension of dialog with a cross section of the campus community which took the present writer beyond the ordinary limitations of his native discipline. In all, major contributions originated in on-going brain storming sessions with a colleague, in in-service and workshop themes developed by a dean, in intensive multiple hour discussions with the campus president, and in continuing perspicacious dialog with a student.

The major source of experimentation, the results of which gave rise to the better portion of what follows, was the attempt to develop an interdisciplinary humanities program by implementing on a trial basis as many new teaching strategies, curriculum sub-components, and alternative pictures of the human dimension of the teaching-learning situation as could be dreamed of.

After seeing these processes through their first two years, it became clear that the evolving concept of general education was so unique an educational point of view that it stood in many ways antithetical to common interpretations of liberal education. In order to reveal these differences I thought it a good exercise to compare the two in order to reveal advantages of this special concept.

In this century, liberal education has seen many changes which put it in an advanced evolutionary stage as an applied educational philosophy. In place of offering a caricature of this advanced stage, I utilize the traditional view of liberal education politically, as a foil off which to bounce general education concepts. This view is a description of the ordinary state of educational affairs employing the lecture method in the standard classroom with the traditional disciplines for the normal four year experience. Thus, although it is true that this characterization is unfair when squared against progressive views of liberal education, my purpose in using it is the purely pedagogical one of revealing in direct fashion the advantages of general education. If revised liberal education eventually becomes in the main what I call general education, all well and good.

In the following, the special formulation of general education and the traditional concept of liberal education are compared in a point by point manner (items of the same number address the same issue). Implications of the traditional view of liberal education can be grasped by reading down the first column and elements of general education by reading down the second. The points in each passage are brief and do not pretend to be

demonstrated through argument. In brevity the checklist format is preserved. The points in each comparison are intended as controversial. For this reason, the lists may serve as a handy in-service tool.

THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF LIBERAL EDUCATION

1. Primarily, the teacher's educational purposes are expected to be adopted by students as their purposes.
2. Teacher experiences are more important than student experiences. In-class activities are, for the most part, teacher activities.
3. The teacher tries to tie students into a spectator role in relation to his or her process, i.e. a captive audience.
4. Curriculum is compartmentalized into disciplines where a "big" picture emerges through four years of endeavor.
5. Grading measures are used as the primary means of evaluating students. These are administered external to the student.
6. Mastery of course subject matter is the primary student goal. Basic learning consists in information retention.
7. Information is learned because it is part of a discipline.

A SPECIAL FORMULATION OF GENERAL EDUCATION

1. Primarily, student educational purposes are expected to be adopted by teachers.
2. Student experiences are more important than teacher experiences. In-class activities are, for the most part, student activities.
3. The teacher facilitates student process. In doing so, the teacher is aware of his or her process and students' processes where the goal is to facilitate student process.
4. Curriculum is designed in relation to student needs with an eye to what can be used in later living. The curriculum is highly flexible in design.
5. Self evaluation is used in response to work accomplished. This is administered by the student.
6. Mastery of skills for projected creative use in future activities is the primary student goal. Basic learning employs student creativity as its source.
7. Information is learned because *the student* identifies that it is essential to the performance of later life activities.

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| 8. Knowledge about persons is learned in the "third" person. | 8. Self knowledge is cultivated as the spring board for understanding other persons. |
| 9. Courses are teacher centered. | 9. Courses are student centered. |
| 10. Studies are limited to the classroom setting. A student's experiences are limited to the academic community and his native community. | 10. Studies are spun off into various communities via investigative field trips. Students have experiences in a variety of communities. |
| 11. Student growth is measured on a comparative scale with other members of a class (i.e. grades, points, and objectives). | 11. Student growth is measured by a student comparing his early work with his later work. |
| 12. Student in-school tasks are the stock academic ones. | 12. Student in-school tasks are open-ended. They cover the full range of what it is to be a human being. |
| 13. There is no student choice in classroom work. | 13. Students have many options for classroom work and can create others. |
| 14. The teacher does not participate in assignments but rather watches, supervises, or moves on to more important work. | 14. The teacher participates in all assignments and shares experiences with students. |
| 15. The teacher-student relation is that of parent/child, boss/employee, or professional/client. | 15. The teacher-student relation is that of friends or acquaintances. |
| 16. Class interaction is discouraged except in relation to the teacher. | 16. Class interaction is encouraged among all members of the class. |
| 17. Students fall back on their strengths in order to survive grade wise. Consequently, they avoid their weaknesses. | 17. Students are not penalized through a grading system, but are rewarded for attempting what they can't already do well. The development of self knowledge and self capability are encouraged and rewarded. |

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| <p>18. Knowledge is acquired for some unidentifiable point in later life.</p> | <p>18. Knowledge is acquired for foreseeable life activities, examples of which are performed (insofar as possible) in the classroom.</p> |
| <p>19. Courses are pre-packaged commodities which students "take."</p> | <p>19. Courses are designed while the course is in progress as student needs and interests surface. Students help design the course.</p> |
| <p>20. New concepts are developed only on a verbal level.</p> | <p>20. New concepts are developed in terms of student experiences (when possible in the classroom). The richer the experience the better.</p> |
| <p>21. Verbal modes of communication are used almost exclusively (i.e. reading, writing, speaking).</p> | <p>21. Communication is treated from a whole-person point of view; in many courses, no preference is given to one mode over another (i.e. dance, writing, photography, etc.).</p> |
| <p>22. Students learn about select achievements of the greatest talents in human history.</p> | <p>22. Students learn about achievements native to their interests, exposures, and needs. Emphasis is placed upon the culture which a student represents and the culture in which he intends to live.</p> |
| <p>23. Learning is classroom based.</p> | <p>23. Learning is community or region based with the college as just one community institution.</p> |
| <p>24. Assignments are textbook based.</p> | <p>24. Assignments are experientially and activity based.</p> |
| <p>25. Students are responsible for learning course "content."</p> | <p>25. Students are responsible for learning "how" to learn while learning course content (i.e. course content is a vehicle for mastering skills basic to learning anything whatsoever).</p> |

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| 26. Courses are oriented to past achievements. | 26. Courses are oriented to present and future activities. |
| 27. Values are talked about. | 27. Values are experienced. |
| 28. Perceptual skills have place only in the fine arts. | 28. Perceptual skills are essential to most learning. |
| 29. Social skills are neglected by the curriculum as well as in classroom activities. | 29. Social skills are instrumental in designing the curriculum as well as key to in-class activity. |
| 30. Classroom norms are based on implied threats. | 30. Classroom norms are based upon group chosen self governance. |
| 31. Personal and social threats guide student performance. | 31. Student performance is self guided and group guided with no implied threats. |
| 32. The in-class environment is set by the institution. | 32. The in-class environment is created by the class. Their identity is invested in it. |
| 33. Class time sequences are set by the institution (e.g. 50-minute classes). Time is organized for the student by the teacher. | 33. Class time sequences are based on what students are doing. Students have occasion to organize and learn to organize their time. |
| 34. In the classroom, students learn about political, cultural, and social institutions in their communities. | 34. Students learn how to <i>use</i> political, cultural, and social institutions as resources in their lives through direct access (e.g. student-community projects, field trips). |
| 35. Students learn about disciplines; teachers talk about their disciplines. | 35. Students do disciplines; teachers do their disciplines in the classroom (when possible). |
| 36. Students learn to be teacher guided and teacher dependent. | 36. Students learn to be self-guided and teacher independent. |
| 37. Learning is for enriching and rounding out the individual. | 37. Learning is for application in living. |

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| <p>38. Students are reinforced in viewing their work external to themselves as "school work," course work, assignments, and or requirements.</p> | <p>38. Students are reinforced in viewing their work as theirs (they are encouraged to take ownership over it).</p> |
| <p>39. Success or failure polarities are the norm.</p> | <p>39. There is no total success or failure, just a series of pieces of work, each with many merits and many ways each can be improved.</p> |
| <p>40. Work is indirectly compared to the work of great genius' in the past.</p> | <p>40. Work is compared to a student's earlier work. Within his work the student develops his own ideals.</p> |
| <p>41. After a four-year experience, persons are considered to be educated.</p> | <p>41. Education is a life long, continuing process.</p> |
| <p>42. A single mode of instruction dominates class time.</p> | <p>42. As many alternative modes of instruction are provided as is possible.</p> |
| <p>43. Little effort is made to demonstrate application of knowledge to contemporary life.</p> | <p>43. Application of knowledge to contemporary life is an integral part of any course.</p> |
| <p>44. The sole class resource is the teacher.</p> | <p>44. The teacher, students, and persons from the community are utilized as resources.</p> |
| <p>45. Student competition is emphasized.</p> | <p>45. Student collaboration and cooperation are emphasized.</p> |
| <p>46. Only classrooms, labs, the library and gymnasium are designed for learning activities. Accordingly, classes must be centralized.</p> | <p>46. All public spaces are designed for learning activities. Accordingly, classes can be decentralized.</p> |

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| <p>47. Students are in a single role — as students.</p> | <p>47. Students can perform roles according to capability: teacher, discussion group leader, activity group leader, tutor to other students, etc.</p> |
| <p>48. Student learning is governed by the pace of the class as a group. Class norms establish some students as “slow” others as “advanced.”</p> | <p>48. Student learning is governed by the individual student’s pace. No student is earmarked “slow” or “advanced.”</p> |
| <p>49. Feedback to the student about his or her accomplishments and progress is exclusively on the occasion that exams or papers are returned.</p> | <p>49. Students can receive feedback from a teacher at any appropriate time, especially while student work is in progress.</p> |
| <p>50. Courses are arranged according to disciplines where the student takes courses which increase in specialization year by year.</p> | <p>50. Courses are designed in correlation with student needs. Accordingly, they are usually interdisciplinary, and at any year level they could be highly specialized, moderately specialized, or non-specialized (where appropriate).</p> |

The general education claims are part of an educational philosophy. Certainly it is unreasonable to expect that most of them be included as goals in designing a single course or program of courses. Rather, single courses or programs of courses can be planned to address a healthy subset of the list. The multiple programs at any institution can, as a group, cover most of them. The Humanities Program at Eastern employs eighteen items as bases to course design with minor emphases on ten others.*

* I would like to extend credit and deep appreciation to Campus President Robert E. Shepack, Dean David C. Mitchell, colleague/master teacher Edward Miggins, and devoted student Pamela Brown Drumheller for major contributions to the present work.

