

NEW CONTOURS*

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I have predicted that there will be an New Student entering colleges and universities in the decade ahead. All of the research that I have been able to garner leads me to doubt that our present educational models are designed to serve him or her well. I see only occasional signs that we are moving in the right directions or even asking the right questions. We are asking how can we enable young people to enter college, but we should also be asking what type of postsecondary educational experiences will contribute to the development of individual talents. We are asking how can we credential the disadvantaged so that they achieve equality of opportunity for good jobs, but we should also be asking how can we educate New Students to full personal development and self-esteem. We are asking how can we compensate for the weaknesses of New Students, but we should also be asking how can we develop their strengths. We are seeking egalitarianism in sameness instead of diversity. One set of questions asks how can we change New Students so that they are more like the traditional students for whom present colleges were designed. The other set of questions asks what should we do about education to make it serve the needs of the increasingly diverse population seeking further education.

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In the past, and especially in the very recent past, student personnel administrators have been charged more with the responsibility of helping students to adjust to colleges than they have with helping colleges to adjust to the diverse learning needs of students. The unspoken assumption is that students can be changed but that institutions cannot. Student personnel administrators have had plenty of opportunity to work with students individually and collectively to interpret to them the requirements of institutions; they have not had much chance to work with faculty or vice presidents for academic affairs to interpret to them the educational needs of students.

If student personnel administration is to survive as a creditable function, priorities must change. In the first place, students are no longer willing to do all the adapting, and student personnel administrators are understandably reluctant to accept a role that implies that their job is to maximize the student-college fit through working with presumably adaptable students and presumably unadaptable institutions. In the second place, the social necessity for a broader spectrum of the population to pursue education beyond high school makes it imperative to rethink the purposes and practices of traditional discipline-bound academic education. And finally, the separation of in-class and out-of-class education is becoming increasingly blurred and difficult and unreasonable to maintain. It is no more logical for student personnel administrators to claim that their job is the out-of-class education of students than it is for teachers to maintain that their educational function is confined to in-class activities. I believe that student personnel administrators at every level

must begin to assert themselves as educators, broadly concerned with how well the institution is serving the needs of students.

I would like to talk this morning about the special educational needs of New Students to college; the implications for change are broad and they affect personnel administrators directly. The figures that I presented on Monday morning define New Students as those who have not done well academically in the past--i.e., the lowest third of the high school graduating class. Almost everyone in this room has been or will be working with these students in increasing numbers in the decade ahead. High school counselors have worked with them all along, but they are facing the new challenge of helping them to make choices about postsecondary educational programs. Open-door and relatively nonselective colleges will increasingly face the difficult tasks of educating college students who have had a consistent record of "below-average" performance in grade school and high school. This fact of life requires a major adjustment from the old days when even open-door colleges dealt primarily with above-average students because students in the lower half of the high school classes didn't go to college at all. Even traditionally selective institutions are newly concerned about "special admissions" students. And we are all concerned about the impact of egalitarianism upon society.

New Students are telling us in a variety of ways that traditional education must be redesigned for the egalitarian era. We know from observation as well as research documentation (Cross, 1971) that they drop out of our traditional schools; they quit listening to lectures; they cease to put forth their best effort; they score low on conventional

tests designed to reflect the heart of the traditional academic curriculum; they get low marks for their school performance; their interests, leisure time activities, and hobbies are "nonacademic"; they fail to develop self-confidence, and they tell us they are nervous and tense in class. They are caught in the impossible bind of wanting to be successful but knowing that in order to do so they must display the style and values that traditional education will certify. To put it bluntly, their most viable option is to become more like traditional students.

In moving from the meritocratic era in education to one of egalitarianism, we have not faced up to the fact that equality of educational opportunity requires more than guarantees of equal access to postsecondary education. Access to education that is inappropriate for the development of individual talents may represent nothing more than prolonged captivity in an environment that offers little more than an opportunity to repeat the damaging experiences with school failure that New Students know so well. John Gardner (1961) has described the situation forthrightly,

In the case of the youngster who is not very talented academically, forced continuance of education may simply prolong a situation in which he is doomed to failure. Many a youngster of low ability has been kept on pointlessly in a school which taught him no vocation, exposed him to continuous failure and then sent him out into the world with a record which convinced employers that he must forever afterward be limited to unskilled or semi-skilled work. This is not a sensible way to conserve human resources. (p.80)

Neither is it a sensible way to develop individual talents. In a society as complex as ours we need to encourage diversity, and yet we seem unable to move away from our unproductive preoccupation with wanting

all children to learn the same things at the same rate. We are in the grip of a "deficiency" conception of New Students. From nursery school to college, we give more attention to correcting the weaknesses of New Students than to developing their strengths.

Why do we try so hard to make New Students over into traditional students? Perhaps the answer lies in the observation that although we have not been able to demonstrate that performance in the traditional discipline-bound curriculum is related to adult success (Warren, 1971), the credentials of traditional colleges are important to occupational opportunity. Understandably New Students want the key that will unlock such future opportunities. But will the certification via the degree bring equal opportunity to New Students? Probably not. There is growing evidence that the possession of the college degree, as such, is declining in importance. As the degree becomes increasingly common, it becomes less useful as a selective device for employers, and it is probably safe to predict that the possession of college credentials will not provide the relative occupational advantage in the future that they have in the past. Employers who have used college credentials as a screening device will not be able to use them in the same way when larger proportions of the population possess college degrees. Whether employers will require still higher educational credentials (either higher degrees or higher grades) or whether they will find criteria more relevant to job performance is unknown. It is predictable that the college dropout will have an increasingly difficult time getting a good job. If colleges provide education that fails to meet a diversity of needs, New Students will still be the ones to make the poorer grades and to drop out of college.

In all likelihood, students who have been in the bottom third in conventional elementary and high schools will simply move up to being the bottom third in college unless new ways are found to recognize and develop the diversity of talent that exists in the rapidly expanding pool of candidates for postsecondary education.

The message is clear that New Students are the losers if we continue to concentrate only on access programs which merely assure the entrance of New Students into traditional programs of education. Why can't we put our minds to work on the creation of new educational programs to fit New Students instead of handing down the old education of traditional students? Perhaps the old education is not as worn out as some traditional students maintain, but like second-hand clothing it is ill-fitting for most New Students.

It is obvious from the research that I have analyzed over the past year, that New Students are not the same size and shape as traditional students. There is little, if any, chance that more than a very few students will be able to diet or gain weight or develop muscle in some spots and lose it in others to fit the educational exercise suits of traditional students. A few tucks and alterations in traditional education, plus a demanding exercise program for New Students, is very unlikely to make New Students look like traditional students or to fool employers and the general society into thinking that they are traditional college students.

New Students as a group differ from the group of young people for whom traditional education was designed. This is not to deny areas of overlap between the two groups. Some New Students look like traditional

students on some dimensions and vice versa. The proposals which I shall set forth may be as advantageous for some so-called traditional students as they are for the particular group of low academic achievers that are the special concern of this lecture. A brief research description of some of the major differences between groups of New and traditional students would look like this:

New Students are positively attracted to careers, and they are oriented to learning things that are tangible and useful. They tend not to value the academic model of higher education that is prized by faculty, preferring instead a vocational model that will teach them what they need to know to make a good living. New Students consistently pick the "nonacademic" activities and interests and competencies from among the lists that we present to them. They prefer watching television programs to reading; they prefer working with tools to working with numbers; they feel more competent in using a sewing machine than in reciting long passages from memory. There are large and consistent differences between the personality characteristics of New Students and traditional students. New Students prefer to learn what others have said rather than to engage in intellectual questioning. They don't enjoy intellectual puzzles or the complicated manipulation of ideas and abstractions. New Students possess a more pragmatic, less questioning, more authoritarian system of values than traditional students.

Upon hearing such characterizations of New Students, many sincere social reformers begin immediately to offer "excuses" as to why New Students don't look like traditional students. Their explanations usually involve the assumption that if New Students had the advantages of traditional students, they would have the "advantage" of thinking

and behaving like traditional students. That may be true, but it smacks of arrogance. Perhaps that brand of arrogance is taught in academe. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1969) observes,

I think about my education sometimes. I went to the University of Chicago for a while after the Second World War. I was a student in the Department of Anthropology. At that time they were teaching that there was absolutely no difference between anybody. They may be teaching that still. (p.7)

John Gardner (1961) has asked, Can we be equal and excellent too? We might paraphrase the question and ask, Can we be different and excellent too? Some people sincerely believe we cannot. The pressure on selective universities to practice open admissions and "special admissions" springs from the fundamental assumption that the education offered by universities is better than that offered by state colleges and community colleges. While I agree with the motives of those who want the best possible education for disadvantaged students, I question the means. I suggest that in the long run it is no more desirable for universities to launch special admissions programs for New Students (as defined by lowest-third achievement) than it is for community colleges to press their faculties for Ph.D's and research publications. The time is past when a single institution can hope to serve the needs of the diverse population now seeking higher education. The notion that universities provide the best in the way of education for New Students is not only a perpetuation of an elitist philosophy in an egalitarian era, it is also probably wrong. Stanley (1971) sums up the arguments against the special recruitment of students who are quite underqualified academically.

It seems likely that trying to compete far above their comfortable level would confine to the easier courses and curricula most students who are quite underqualified academically, thereby limiting their choice. Although

such students may pass most of their courses with C's and D's, one wonders what they will be learning relative to what they might learn in another college where their relative level of abilities is average or better. In addition, the negative concept of themselves which they may develop as low men on the academic totem pole must be considered. Perhaps they should be encouraged to attend colleges more geared to their level of academic competence. Not many colleges in the United States are highly selective: at least 2000 others of all sorts can accommodate most levels of developed ability and achievement. (p.644)

Surely quality education consists--not in offering the same thing to all people in a token gesture toward equality--but in maximizing the match between the talents of the individual and the teaching resources of the institution. Educational quality is not unidimensional. Colleges can be different and excellent too. If New Students are different and not simply less capable academicians than traditional students, then I believe that education for New Students must be different in order to be excellent.

Most of the modifications in higher education that have been made--or even suggested--to accommodate the egalitarian era are concerned with the structures and forms of college programs rather than with the content. Major energies have been directed toward getting New Students into college and keeping them there. Open admissions, special recruitment of disadvantaged students, and financial aid programs are practices that are in widespread use throughout the country to attract New Students to college. Remedial courses, counseling, and pass-fail grading are common methods designed to keep New Students in college. Since getting New Students into--and, hopefully, through--college, has been our almost single-minded goal, it is not surprising that virtually all evaluation of our achievements has been concerned

with quoting statistics on increased rates of access and retention. There seems to be general agreement that retention (although not necessarily performance) is directly related to the amount of special effort and attention given to New Students. "Total push" programs combining counseling, remediation, and financial aid, while not universally successful, are at least more effective than "remediation" alone. Only recently have a few scattered voices questioned whether recruitment and retention are really the goals. I think they are not. The goal of educators is to educate. We have, however, sold out to the false goal of certification, and in our eagerness to get degrees in the hands of New Students, we are afraid to ask ourselves whether we are educating them. We have been told for so long that the quality of education makes little or no difference in the outcome (Coleman, 1966; Astin, 1968) that we have succumbed to fatalistic acceptance of the notion that the credential will do as much for the New Student as the education. There are cheaper and more honest ways to certify.

Let us look first at what certification has meant in the past and what it is likely to mean in the future. In the past, it has meant that the student has had enough persistence and motivation to sit through 128 credit hours of instruction at some kind of institution. Although everyone is well aware of the fact that most entering freshmen at highly selective institutions have already accomplished more academically than most graduates of some other four-year institutions, that fact has never really interfered with the public conception that a college graduate is a college graduate. The certificate has also put the college graduate on a higher rung of the occupational ladder.

Looming on the horizon now, however, are quite a number of trends that portend changes in the value and process of certification. We have already discussed the practical uselessness of a certificate that the majority of the population possess. There is also a large body of evidence that performance in the traditional academic curriculum is not very closely related to job performance or to personal happiness or to contributions to society when these criteria bear little relationship to the predictors. And finally, the newest form of certification--the external degree--is the exact opposite of the present certification. Advocates of the external degree propose to certify the level of accomplishment regardless of the pathways used to reach it. This involves a quite different concept from that used in certifying the pathways regardless of the final level of accomplishment. The realists who argue for equality of opportunity through equality of certification may be oriented to the reality of the past instead of to that of the future. Since I am often critical of university students for their over-developed talent for criticism and their under-developed sense of responsibility for suggestions of what to do about the mess the world is in, let me offer a specific proposal.

The fundamental premise upon which my proposal is based is that excellent education involves the basic goal of helping each individual to achieve a sense of competence and self-worth through accomplishment. No one needs to be good at all things, but everyone should have the opportunity to be good at something. We have not granted that right in the schools to New Students in the past. Basically, schools and the academic curriculum have been designed by people who are good at

academic tasks for people who are good at academic tasks. In the heyday of our meritocracy there was a strong emphasis on stripping all of the "frills" from the high school and college experience with the avowed purpose of making them more academic. Sports, queen contests, and all other nonacademic frivolities have been, or are being, systematically weeded out of secondary and higher education. The result is that people who aren't good at academic subjects in school don't have much opportunity to shine at anything. I am not arguing for a return to queen contests and homecoming weekends. I am urging that we seek to enter into the school experience a much wider variety of worthwhile learning experiences so that every child can have an opportunity to develop a high level of accomplishment in some area. Whether the developed talent is academic or nonacademic is not really as important as whether the child feels that he is learning to improve his competence in some worthwhile endeavor. Too often, we equate "learning" with "academic". Many so-called nonacademic abilities require extensive learning and are in the best sense of the term truly educational. Education has the responsibility to help each student to accomplish some worthwhile endeavor at a high level of proficiency. The primary concern of the education that I wish to describe is with the quality of learning and performance, not with the specific nature of the subject matter.

A major source of difficulty with the present approach to learning in the typical classroom is that in specifying what is to be learned, we must permit individual variation in how well it is learned. Everyone must read Silas Marner, we say, but we recognize that some will do it

more competently than others. For New Students compromises have been made throughout their school years in the quality of the learning instead of in the subject of the learning. When this happens, some people are always poor performers, and it is no wonder that New Students think of themselves as "below-average" people and that employers complain of sloppy workmanship. I propose that we reverse the present trends to certify that all students were exposed to the same curriculum, certifying instead that students are high performers in quite disparate areas of accomplishment. There must be no compromise on quality of performance, but it is essential to permit wide individual variation in the choice of the learning subjects. This reversal in the emphasis of the educational task is not only more humane, it is also more realistic. Once we get out of school, we choose the areas in which we will display our competencies. Only in school do we require children to display--more or less publicly--their weaknesses. Human dignity demands the right to be good at something. Indeed a healthy society is built upon the premise that all citizens will contribute their best talents. The social necessity of emphasizing quality of performance and deemphasizing area of performance has been eloquently expressed by John Gardner (1961).

An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than and incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water. (p.86)

If then excellence is to be the goal, what are the areas in which

New Students show potential strength and how can these be matched to the needs of society so that we are developing full individual and societal potential? The world's work can be roughly catalogued under three major headings. To put it as directly as possible, we need people to work with people; we need people to work with things; and we need people to work with ideas. I propose that we aim for an ultimate goal in which each citizen attains excellence in one sphere and at least minimal competence in the other two.

It is of considerable significance that the most urgent societal needs of the present are those in which New Students show particular interest and ability. It is increasingly evident that progress in the foreseeable future will be measured by our effectiveness in dealing with human problems and technical problems--people and things. In an advanced society, there will always be a need to push back the frontiers of knowledge by educating and utilizing the talents of people with special gifts in dealing with ideas. There will certainly be a market for traditional students, but we may not need to increase the proportion of traditionally trained students. Already there are ominous predictions about the oversupply of traditionally educated young workers. How unfortunate it will be if, in our misguided haste to bestow equality upon all people, we encourage New Students to enter the ranks of the unemployed by educating them for the glutted academic labor markets when so many New Students show particular strengths and interests in working in the emerging specialties dealing with human problems and those involved with keeping the machinery of the technological age in running condition.

I have proposed that each student should be helped to develop excellence in one of three spheres of excellence--working with things, people, or ideas--and that he be offered the opportunity to develop at least minimum competence in the other two. This may mean that the potentially excellent mechanic needs tutoring in English, but it also means that the future excellent college professor may need tutoring in the fundamentals of machine repair. Both are handicapped in the modern world without minimum competence in the other's sphere of excellence. And there are few in our society who can survive without at least minimum skills in working with people. Some students are capable of developing outstanding effectiveness and sensitivity to the needs of people and may elect working with people as their sphere of excellence; others may opt for developing minimum or average competency in being able to get along with people.

There is considerable educational merit in promoting the concept of buddy tutoring--e.g., if you tutor me in medieval history, I'll tutor you in auto repair. It is the observation of many working with peer tutoring programs that the tutors seem to learn as much, if not more than, the tutees. Buddy tutoring, then, would have the double advantage of developing the tutor's sphere of excellence while developing the tutee's sphere of competence.

As we contemplate the movement into an egalitarian age, it is intriguing to think about the increased perceptions that might be gained by the academically successful youth from the upper middle class, for example, as he copes with the intricacies of machine repair. In the first place, he discovers that he lacks the vocabulary to know one machine part from another. Furthermore, he may find that while he is

trying to use his developed skill in reading the repair manual, the instructor is "moving too fast" in a field that doesn't depend on verbalization. To add to his difficulties, he finds that his parents are totally unable to help him because that kind of learning is not in their background and the materials for learning are not easily available in the home. In other words, a student who has always been successful in school finds himself "educationally disadvantaged", and his symptoms are those that have appeared so often in research descriptions of the disadvantaged. It may be that such exposure to a field in which he is not expected to be an expert--just competent--would do more than anything else to improve the image of vocational education. But it may also become as essential for all of us to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the machine age in which we live as it is for all of us to be able to read and to communicate with people.

Different methods of instruction are expected to be differentially effective depending upon the sphere of study. Lectures and paper-and-pencil tests may well be effective ways of preparing students to work with ideas--although there is now considerable questioning of this venerable assumption. Group work, shop work, and experience in industry and the community may be the best techniques for teaching excellence in the people and things spheres. Such learning experiences should be given full college credit. They are educational in the best meaning of the term, as long as the emphasis is on learning to perform better or to know more or to deepen appreciation and understanding of the sphere of excellence and one's own place in it.

In proposing that we set about the job of designing a new education

for the egalitarian era, I am suggesting that we make it both possible and necessary for individuals to take pride in their accomplishments. Excellence becomes possible through centering our attention on the strengths of individuals; it becomes necessary through demanding high standards of performance of those with low academic abilities and interests as well as those with more traditional academic ability.

Where would such a proposal leave student personnel administrators? Although I don't view myself as an educational radical, I have come to believe that radical changes will take place in the definition of student personnel administration--especially as it is practiced in traditional 4-year colleges. In my proposal, student personnel administrators would become educational specialists in the sphere of excellence in working with people. Their special strength lies in their training, sensitivity, judgment, and experience in dealing with other people. They, along with other people-related specialists such as psychologists and sociologists, would be responsible for developing the curriculum and for working with students who, like themselves, wished to develop expertise in fields requiring skill in interpersonal relationships. Direction of tutoring programs, the conduct of extensive group experience, the establishment of effective community relations, counseling, and supervision of practicum programs would be the new responsibilities of student personnel administrators. Their jobs would change from administrators to educators. As I view the new contours, I see counselors and deans retaining their special concerns with the practice of skills in interpersonal relationships, but I see a wholly-integrated curriculum of classwork and practicum in which student personnel administrators are full-fledged faculty members, responsible primarily for

the direction of students' practice in the sphere of excellence involved in working with people. Such a role builds upon the backgrounds and abilities of student personnel administrators who have long worked with group processes, the training of student counselors, and relationships with employers, alumni, and the community at large. It seems to me virtually impossible to develop excellence in the sphere of working with people without practice in this skill. At the present time we have no faculty members in academe who make any pretense of applying what is learned about people in the classroom to the real world of working directly with people. As the people-related disciplines such as psychology and sociology are taught now, they are not orientated toward developing abilities in interpersonal relationships, but rather toward the preparation of future graduate students and scholars in the field. And that fact is precisely why many students are complaining that their classroom subjects are irrelevant.

If student personnel administrators are to become educators instead of administrators, who will perform the present administrative chores of student personnel administration? My answer may be horrifying to some of you and a blessed relief to others, but my hunch is that the administration of dormitories, financial aids and student unions will be taken over by business managers. Indeed, many of these functions are already under the jurisdiction of financial vice presidents. In some institutions, the administration of such functions has already moved to private enterprise off campus. On other campuses with a stronger tradition of student personnel administration, I have recently observed

the appointment of men with business backgrounds as vice presidents for student affairs. The financial peril of many institutions is making the efficient management of college resources the Number One priority of many presidents and trustees. The operation of the dormitories, for example, is likely to be evaluated in financial terms in the absence of any evidence that an evaluation can be made in educational terms.

As you all know, something else is happening to erode the traditional duties of student personnel administrators. The advising of student groups is rapidly becoming a defunct operation. Student governments are giving way to campus governing bodies, consisting of students, faculty, and administrators. And groups that do retain student membership are imbued with the notion that they don't need advisors.

I believe that the contours of student personnel administration are changing more rapidly than any other aspect of college organization. While the adjustments are extremely difficult for the people caught in the maelstrom of change, I am optimistic that the profession of student personnel administration will eventually emerge as a stronger discipline with an identity of its own.

Predictions are a wonderful tactic to use in a consultation. By the time any prediction having to do with the contours of change can possibly come to pass, people will have forgotten what I had to say. If I am wrong, I can forget it too. If I am later proved right, I can remind you of my predictions and dig out old speeches to illustrate my occult powers. I think, however, that it is a very safe prediction that student personnel administration 20 years from now will be dramatically different from what we know today. Personally, I welcome

any change that would move this venerable field and the able people in it into a more central role in the mainstream of the education of youth.

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