

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF THE STUDENT PERSONNEL PROFESSION

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How should student personnel workers be preparing for the future? What can colleges do to prepare the citizens of today and tomorrow for their life-long role as learners and decision makers? First, let us address the question of how any educator or counselor can undertake to prepare anyone for an unknown and probably unknowable future. Frankly, we don't know what the world will be like even five to ten years ahead. Margaret Mead once observed that the world in which we live is not the world we were born in nor is it the world in which we will die. Today's fifty year olds were born into a world in which the average citizen had no experience with television, commercial air travel, credit cards, computers, or frozen foods. These modern conveniences, virtually unknown in 1930, dominate our lives in 1980. Generations used to change faster than the world about them, and thus parents and teachers could pass along to the new generation what they needed to know to get along in the world. Tomorrow was simply a repeat of yesterday. Now, however, the world changes faster than the generations, and it is clear that no education will last a lifetime.

The rate of change is so fast in many professions that obsolescence can be measured in terms of the half-life, a measure borrowed from nuclear physics. The half-life of a professional's competence is the time after completion of professional training when, because of new developments, practicing professionals become roughly half as competent as they were upon graduation. The growth of new knowledge in medicine, for example, has been so rapid that the half-life for doctors is estimated at about five years. In psychology, it is thought to be about ten years (Dubin, 1972). It is hard to guess what the half-life of student personnel administration might be.

Fifteen years ago none of the following topics were on the student personnel agenda--declines in student enrollment, adult learners, retrenchment, affirmative action, government regulations, major revisions of the general education curriculum, declining test scores, or almost anything else that seems relevant today. Some topics, of course, are timeless. They appear on the agenda of every age--but often in widely differing contexts. Fifteen years ago, dropouts were to be discouraged by student personnel workers because of the potential damage to the student's future. Then along came the popularization of the word "stopout" and counselors were supposed to have an open mind about whether stopping out might be a useful growth experience for the student. Now "retention" is the word, and we are back to discouraging dropouts, this time on the grounds that it is bad for the college.

Who can say for sure what student personnel workers will need to know by the end of this decade? Since education is supported by the people to the extent that it serves the needs of society, let us look first at the needs of the society in the 1980s. Unemployment is neither a recent nor temporary phenomenon (Best and Stern, 1976). For the past 50 years, society has been unable to provide enough jobs for everyone except in times of war. The solution so far has been to protect jobs for the middle years of life by extending the years of school for young people and by forcing older people into ever earlier retirement. This has the effect of making marked distinctions in the activities appropriate to the various life stages. Education is for the young, work for the middle aged, and leisure for the elderly. Now, however, there seems to be growing dissatisfaction with this model, which has been called the "linear lifeplan," and Americans are moving toward a blended lifeplan in which learning, work, and leisure go on concurrently throughout

life. Sociologists are observing the rise of what has been called "rights consciousness" or the "psychology of entitlement." Today almost everyone feels entitled to a job. At the same time, almost everyone feels entitled to education and to full enjoyment of their leisure hours. Older people have insisted upon their right to work if they want to, and Congress has endorsed that right through a rollback of mandatory retirement. Young people are showing increasing dissatisfaction with long years of uninterrupted schooling, especially when there is no guarantee of the well-paid and meaningful job to which they feel entitled at the other end of the educational pipeline. There has been a steady increase in the number of students exercising their right to a job. Nationwide, the majority of college students today are already in the labor market--all of which brings about the phenomenon of the part-time student, part-time worker, part-time vacationer. There is nothing very exceptional anymore about the individual who attends college, holds a job, and takes off for what would once have been considered extravagant leisure weekends of skiing or surfing.

It is not only young people who feel entitled to the good life as a blend of work, education, and leisure. Women, dissatisfied with unidimensional lives are flooding into the labor market--and into education--in unprecedented numbers. Blue-collar workers feel entitled, as never before, to a life beyond the factory. Labor unions are negotiating education and vacations into contracts. There is a rising desire on the part of the rank-and-file for benefits beyond mere wages--benefits that enhance the quality of life. The point is that after a long human history of moving steadily toward the linear lifeplan, people from all walks of life seem to be opting for the blended lifeplan which permits learning, work, and leisure to go on concurrently.

The blended lifeplan requires some major rethinking of student personnel services--what they are and how they should be delivered. Some of the more obvious changes are already familiar--especially on campuses experiencing an influx of older students. Student personnel services must often be extended to evening and weekend hours, financial aid provided for part-time students, and counseling made available to reentry women and mid-life career changers. But the blended lifeplan is more than the "greying of the campus." It affects the lifeplans of younger students too. For example, the number of credit hours carried by the average student has been declining for some years now, creating the phenomenon of more cars in the parking lots than bodies in the classrooms. Counselors are generally more aware than budget officers that students carrying six credit hours require as much in the way of student services as full-time students. Moreover, the blended lifeplan brings adult life problems with employers and spouses into the once protective environment of the ivied halls.

At the same time that there is a blending of life activities for individuals, there is a blending of function among the organizations of society. Schools no longer have a monopoly on education, nor do businesses tend strictly to business. Employers are increasingly into education, conducting on-the-job training for employees, workshops for professionals, and think-tanks for executives. Travel agencies are adding educational components to packaged tours at the same time that alumni offices and university extension services are adding packaged tours to credit bearing courses. Increasingly, the learning society consists of a rich mixture of community learning resources, and no educational provider has any monopoly on the learning market.

This means that we must begin to think of student services provided by professional colleagues outside the educational establishment. As lifelong learning pervades the society, guidance and information services are being offered in libraries, storefronts, offices, and housing developments. It seems a virtual certainty that the expanding market for educational counselors in the 1980s will be in the workplace and in community agencies rather than on college campuses. One of the early outcomes of the Lifelong Learning Act was the creation of Education Information Centers (EICs). Their purpose is to provide educational information and counseling to potential learners seeking information about the vast array of educational options in the learning society. On-campus student personnel workers, as well as the profession as a whole, will need to think about the coordination of services with a new set of professional colleagues.

What all this means is that education is moving toward student centered learning. Worldwide, learning is perceived as a characteristic of the learner rather than an offering of the provider. Attention is turning from teaching to learning, and that shift will have considerable impact on traditional education.

The implications for education show clearly in the definition of lifelong learning adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1976:

"The term 'lifelong education and learning'. denotes an overall scheme aimed both at restructuring the existing education system and at developing the entire educational potential outside the education system; in such a scheme men and women are the agents of their own education. . . ."

That definition contains three basic ideas about the nature of lifelong learning: One is that the entire formal educational system, from elementary school through graduate school, should be restructured to develop lifelong

learners. Second, the UNESCO statement makes clear that it is not just schools and colleges that are to serve as the targets for improved education. Rather the world is full of people, organizations, and other learning resources that can be marshalled in behalf of lifelong learning. Third, this definition stresses the importance of helping people become self-directed learners, the active agents of their own education.

We in the United States tend to take a more limited view of lifelong learning. Despite lip service to the notion that lifelong learning includes cradle to the grave learning, we rarely think of the lifelong learning movement as a call for the reform of elementary education. Yet it is increasingly apparent that the education of lifelong learners must begin very early. We are quite unlikely to develop a lifelong learner through trying to entice an adult who hated school as a youngster back into the classroom.

Survey research is unanimous in concluding that the single most important predictor of whether an adult will engage in adult education is past level of educational attainment (Cross, 1979). Learning is addictive; the more education people have, the more they want and the more they take advantage of available opportunities. A high school graduate is three times as likely as an elementary school graduate to participate in adult education, and a college graduate is twice as likely as a high school graduate to be engaged in educational activities as an adult (Cross, 1979).

There is good news and bad news in those statistics. The good news is that education is self-propelling, and the better educated people are, the faster they will propel us into the learning society. And the populace is becoming better educated with each passing generation. Eighty-four percent of today's young people between the ages of 20 and 24 have a high school

education or more, compared with only 66 percent of the generation that would constitute their parents and 45 percent of the grandparent generation (Bureau of the Census, 1977). Given the addictive nature of education, the rising educational attainment of the nation will almost certainly result in increased demand for adult learning opportunities and in increased participation in a wide variety of options.

As educational attainment rises, demand for educational opportunities increases, and this means, among other things, that we are quite unlikely to run out of people to educate. Almost anything that any college or other educational provider does to educate people stimulates rather than satiates the market. An excellent example of such stimulation exists in the impact of the television documentary, Roots, on the educational resources of the society. Not only did this nationally televised course in black history result in increased registration in formal courses in history, black studies, and anthropology, but records bureaus and libraries reported significant increases in requests for help with self-directed learning projects on family history. Thus, far from competing for students in a finite educational market, educational providers in the learning society are actually creating new demands for their services.

The bad news in the finding that the more education people have the more they want is that the educational gap between the well-educated and the poorly educated in this nation is increasing. Research is clear in documenting the fact that adult education, viewed as the sum total of all organized learning opportunities for adults, serves largely the privileged classes. As a group, today's adult learners are disproportionately young, white, well-educated, and making good salaries. Furthermore, the situation with respect to equal opportunity is becoming worse for all groups except women.



The greatest increases in educational participation during the decade of the 70s were made by white women with college degrees and family incomes of \$25,000 a year and over. The rate of growth for women was more than double that for men; adult learning activities for the college educated increased twice as fast as for high school graduates; and the participation rate for whites increased eight times as fast as that for blacks (Boaz, 1978). Thus not only are white, well-educated people with good jobs already overrepresented on the adult education scene, they are making much faster progress than their less well-educated peers, and the educational gap between the "haves" and "have nots" is increasing.

There are many things that can and should be done to encourage the participation of those who stand to gain the most from further education--better information about available opportunities, convenient and effective educational and career counseling for adults, equity in financial aid, and more job relevant education--to cite a few of the more prominent proposals. While these steps are most certainly desirable, they seem to me to ignore the fundamental importance of personal motivation. It is reasonable to suggest that the same factors that led to the early school leaving of the poorly educated are responsible for their reluctance to return. Thus the UNESCO call for restructuring the existing educational system is a necessary first step into an equitable learning society.

The other two elements of the UNESCO definition are equally important, namely the development of self-directed learners and the full utilization of the learning resources of the community. The growth in the number and variety of learning providers is a reality of the 1980s that few academics are even aware of. The education budgets of some businesses dwarf those of major

universities. Last year AT&T spent 900 million dollars on the education of its employees, compared to about 200 million dollars spent by MIT. (Luxenberg, 1978/79).

Perhaps the most important element of reform suggested in the UNESCO definition is that men and women should be the "active agents of their own education." By using the term "active agents" UNESCO is not suggesting that learners should become independent of schools and other providers of educational services. Rather they are urging that learners should be encouraged to take a more active role in the direction and form of their education. I believe that the single most important goal for educators in the 1980s is the development of lifelong learners who possess the tools and the motivation to pursue a variety of learning interests throughout their lives. No profession has more opportunity, or more obligation to contribute to the development of lifelong learners than the counseling profession.

How do counselors interested in human growth and development, help an increasingly diverse student population select growth enhancing options from all those present in the environment of the learning society? It used to be that a college counselor could get along reasonably well knowing something about adolescent development, but now, it seems, some understanding of the seven or eight stages of adult development is needed. What do counselors need to know about the lifecycle? What does the profession need to know about it?

These questions and the impossibility of finding easy answers to them illustrate the explosive expansion of the profession--vertically through the years of the lifespan, horizontally into the multiple learning resources of the society, and now it appears that there is a third dimension consisting

of the explosion of knowledge about how human beings grow and develop. Even for college student personnel workers whose lives are sheltered enough to leave them working largely with full-time adolescent students, knowledge about adolescents is X times as great as it was a decade ago, and adolescents know X times as much about the world as did their predecessors.

Each person is entitled to his or her own vision of the future, but my vision for the helping professions of the learning society involves educating people to be sophisticated and demanding consumers of human services, in education, health, and welfare. Of the three, the health professions are far in the lead. They are already working toward much heavier emphasis on preventive medicine which places responsibility with the individual, as opposed to traditional medicine which continues to place responsibility in the hands of the physician, often with very little understanding on the part of the patient. The ideal of student personnel worker as educator has long been prominent in speeches and in the literature; in practice it is frequently quicker and easier to create regulations and provide direct services than to design growth enhancing experiences that teach people how to provide for themselves.

There is some danger that the educational system itself is geared to creating dependent rather than independent learners. Most classroom teachers still regard it as sufficient to define the subject matter, assign readings, and test for subject matter mastery, despite the fact that such an antiquated model is increasingly incompatible with the demands of the learning society. Indeed, it is not much improvement over the memorization of lectures required 300 years ago. Few adults, on the job or in their role as citizens and family members, are ever told what they need to know or where the answers will be found. Much more common is the situation where the learner is

required to define the problem, locate appropriate learning materials, and demonstrate, not just subject matter comprehension, but the ability to apply the knowledge on the job, in the home, or for personal development.

The development of autonomous, self-directing lifelong learners, were it to become the goal of higher education in the 1980s, would stimulate the education industry and benefit the society in much the same way that gourmet cooks or physical fitness buffs have sparked remarkable vitality in the industries that serve them. Without question, knowledgeable cooks with developed tastes have stimulated the economy of the cooking and dining industry. The more people know about foods, cooking, and nutrition, the more imaginative and responsive the industry must become. The gourmet cooking movement has demanded and received a tremendous response from restaurateurs, manufacturers of cooking equipment, cooking schools, and publishers of specialized cookbooks and magazines. Similarly, the more knowledgeable runners and joggers are regarding their needs, the more likely they are to demand 40 varieties of running shoes over the all-purpose sneaker of a decade ago. Were we really about the business of developing gourmet learners and responding to their needs, we would not be worried about the survival of institutions of higher education. We would be pushed to be responsive to a public demanding new developments, better services and improved products--and people would be willing to pay for them. Perhaps the reluctance of people to support education in the style to which we have become accustomed is due more to the tiredness of our product than to a lack of faith in education. Ten years ago, the sneaker industry would have said there was no market for greater variety in active sport shoes. The difference between yesterday and today is that the society now consists of large numbers of runners and joggers and tennis players able to assess their individualistic

needs and willing to pay large dividends to the industry responding. While some college teachers insist that nothing will ever replace the standard classroom lecture as sound and efficient pedagogical technique, that is a little like saying that nothing will ever replace sneakers as the standard American sport shoe, or meat and potatoes as the universal American diet. Tastes do develop and change, and as people are exposed to alternatives, whether in physical fitness, cooking, or in education, large numbers are likely to find something that suits their particular needs better than the standard fare.

But let's face it, most learners whether traditional 18 year olds or nontraditional 40 year olds, are not gourmet learners. And educators must assume some responsibility for the lack of good taste in learning experiences that seems to predominate in today's market. Perhaps that is one reason for the growing concern about quality. If learners don't know good education from bad, they must be protected through regulation, and there are many efforts now to bring so-called nontraditional alternatives for adults under closer regulation. To deal with the immediate problem that may be necessary, but in the long run the development of knowledgeable consumers of lifelong learning will do far more than any amount of regulation to enrich the lives of individuals, improve the services of educational providers, and contribute to the full development of the learning society.

The guidance profession holds a critical key to the quality of education in the 1980s. The business of student personnel workers is to help the users of education obtain the services most appropriate to their needs. The profession holds the enviable link between demand and supply. On the one hand, student personnel administrators can develop more sophisticated consumers of

educational services by helping learners to assess their individualistic needs. On the other hand, they can help educational providers be imaginative in responding to such needs. Some counselors feel uncomfortable in the linking role, preferring to work with students on the one hand and institutions on the other, turning first to one task and then the other without forging a strong connection between the two sides of the profession. But forging that link is critical for the 1980s, and it requires a more assertive stance on the part of the profession.

Educational consumers have never possessed more clout, nor have educational providers ever been more responsive to the desires of what is blatantly called "the market." Both are seeking the link that will bring them together. Learners want to know how they can best meet their needs from the expanding choices available, and providers want to be responsive. The student personnel profession has an unprecedented opportunity in these formative years of the learning society to provide the linking service that will bring learners and providers together in the most productive combinations. No role is more important in the development of the learning society, and no profession is better suited to helping people of all ages and from all walks of life request and select the kind of education that will enhance the quality of their lives.

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