

Professionalism in Educating for Diversity

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Toward increased professionalism is the theme of this convention. What does it mean? Most people think of professionals as people engaged in careers that require long years of academic preparation--doctors, lawyers, and teachers, for example. Sports fans, however, may think of a professional as one who is good enough to leave the ranks of amateurs and to be paid for his participation in sports--sometimes very handsomely. Then there is the definition of professional as it applies to conduct, i.e. acceptance of certain ethical standards adopted by the profession. But we tend to forget that the noun profession comes from the verb profess, and the first definition given in the dictionary is that profession is an act of openly declaring a belief, faith, or opinion.

Now I do not know what your program committee had in mind when they selected "Toward Increased Professionalism" as the theme for this convention. Do they wish to emphasize the academic preparation required of teachers? Do they wish to draw some subtle comparisons between the salaries of teaching professions and those of professional football players? Are they, in these times of public dismay over the ethics of the lawyers and politicians involved in Watergate and its aftermath, perhaps concerned about the ethics of the teaching profession? Or are they thinking of emphasizing the need for a renewed profession of faith in community colleges and what they represent?

Since I have the honor of appearing at the opening session of this annual convention, I have the advantage of picking the definition that pleases me. I certainly don't reject money, ethics, and training as worthy goals of increased professionalism, but to me teaching in a community college is a profession of belief and a commitment to educational opportunity. The professors of the teaching profession profess their belief in what they are doing. And so I'd like to talk about what community colleges are doing, whether you as faculty members believe in it, and if so, how you can do it better.

The community college philosophy was activated by those who professed a belief in equality of educational opportunity. Open admissions, low tuition, and convenient locations are, perhaps, the most distinctive features of community colleges. Only one of these three trademarks of the community college movement, however, requires any real commitment and faith on the part of the faculty, and that is the open-admissions feature. Faculty everywhere, in selective as well as nonselective institutions, are in favor of making education easily available at low cost to young people who are able and interested in scholarly activities. The uniqueness of the community college lies in its dedication to serving all the people--the academically inept as well as the academically able. Such a mission involves a willingness to take the risks that departing from accepted academic tradition involves. I want, then, to talk about increased professionalism as the courage to be different from, rather than similar to, traditional higher education. And that takes training, ethical and moral commitment, and profession of dedication to the mission of community colleges. It also involves moving from amateur to professional status in developing educational and pedagogical expertise.

Under the rhetoric of equal educational opportunity, there lies the

reality that as soon as colleges forego the luxury of selecting students to fit colleges, they take on the obligation of designing colleges to fit students. While we have redesigned the admissions practices to welcome all potential learners to community colleges, we have not redesigned the methods and curricula to educate all. The position that is still defended by most academics is that academic standards will be preserved and that no one will be graduated without meeting those standards. On the face of it, that seems both reasonable and rational, but I shall contend that it is a concept that needs reexamination. I have nothing against standards. I believe that they are an absolute necessity in education and in life. I believe that learning is made meaningful by the pursuit of excellence--and that implies standards. The problem that I see in the conventional defense of the preservation of academic standards is that they were conceived in different times for different purposes and for a different student population than those we now have. We have not measured the standards inherited from other times against the new needs of society nor have we looked carefully at whether meeting traditional academic standards is the best way to develop the potential talents of the diverse student body that we now have.

For too long standards have been defined by the fact that each level of schooling is primarily directed toward preparing students for the next level. High schools measure their success as educational institutions by how many of their graduates go on to college. Colleges measure their success by how many enter graduate school; graduate schools measure their success by how many continue in academic careers. Grades in high school predict grades in college, but they do not correlate very highly with later success or happiness in either vocational or personal life. Despite our public statements about egalitarian education, educational standards are still geared, by and large,

to the training of an academic elite. But that is not our only national purpose any longer--although it is important to recognize that it may quite legitimately be accepted as the purpose of some institutions to select and educate people for academic leadership. We need to cultivate intellectual ability of the highest order, but we also need people who achieve outstanding capabilities in other areas of accomplishment. We have not checked our old definitions of academic standards against the new needs of society.

Major questions are being raised now about the number of traditionally academically trained people that can be fully utilized by society. We are told that only 20 percent of the jobs of the 1980's will utilize what a college student learns. But in cities such as Miami, Florida, and New York City and in the state of California, between 70 and 80 percent of the high school graduates are entering college. If we achieved our goal of educating all these young people to meet traditional academic standards, we could conceivably end up with the most dysfunctional educational system the world has ever known.

Our options are really two, I think. Fortunately, they are not mutually exclusive. We can view higher education as a liberating experience that will enrich the lives of students outside of their vocations. There are many who would solve the coming crisis of an oversupply of college graduates by deemphasizing the vocational purposes of college and placing more emphasis on liberal education and on education for the increasing leisure time that lies ahead. If we follow this route and this one alone, however, we must be prepared to admit that our rhetoric about equality of opportunity is a false promise. We may as well face squarely the fact that for most people the real reason for the popularity of college is its presumed vocational

advantage. But people who see the college degree as a sure path to upward mobility are looking at the past instead of the future. Because a college degree had obvious economic advantages when 10 percent of the population had one does not mean that it will have the same relative advantage when 50 percent of the population has one. If our hope for equality of opportunity through education is to have meaning, we must look beyond the certificate to the usefulness of the education to the individual and to society. That means, I think, that we will have to find better ways of developing the talents of individuals to fill the diverse needs of society.

Let us look at that challenge more carefully. We know that on any single dimension of human ability, half of the students in the nation will be below average--by definition. Naive egalitarians have the notion that working with the bottom half will somehow raise them to equal status with the top half. Well, unfortunately, status in the society is relative, and on any single measure there will always be a lower half. There is, however, a way to reduce the number in the lower half, and that is to expand the number of dimensions along which talent is measured. Statistically speaking, on any single dimension, only half of the people will be above average. If, however, talent is measured on two independent dimensions, then 75 percent will be above average on one or the other dimension. If three independent talents are assumed, the statistical probability is that 87.5 percent will be above average on one of the three dimensions. In reality, human abilities tend to be modestly related. There is, for example, some relationship between high school grades and leadership positions. Even the modest correlation that exists, however, is probably more attributable to the success experiences and the resultant self-confidence of the good student than it is of any tendency for academic and social abilities to

be innately related. We see much the same phenomenon in the correlations between the height and salary of business executives. Tall men tend to make more money because height for a male in this society affects how he feels about himself and how others react to him. Academic ability, like male height, is given an artificial value by our society far exceeding its true significance for contribution. Height is of critical importance to a basketball player and academic ability is of critical importance to a scholar, but neither is an index of human potential.

By this time we know that there are individual differences in academic ability and that those differences are probably unrelated to the color of

one's skin, or to height, or weight, or any other physical characteristic. Exactly how much of what we call academic aptitude is due to environment and how much to heredity is a question that defies our methodology at present. But the issue may not be that important. It is only important under the assumption that people with high academic ability are worth more than those with talents in other areas. If we persist in thinking that the ability to perform academic tasks is a measure of human worth, then we face the prospect of creating a new group of "disadvantaged" that consists of all those with below-average academic aptitude. One would hope that we might have learned some lessons about the evil of disenfranchising at birth any group of human beings. We must begin now to look beyond academic ability as the sole determiner of human contribution. There are other talents of equal importance in creating a humane society.

Harvard's Jerome Kagan goes so far as to say that he wants "children rank-ordered on the basis of humanism as we rank-order on the basis of reading and mathematics." He claims that schools exist to serve the needs of society, and that the greatest need now is to restore faith, honesty, and humanity. Thus he says, "I am suggesting in deep seriousness that we must, in the school, begin to reward those traits as the Spartans rewarded physical fitness (Saturday Review, 1973, p 43)." While I agree with Kagan that we must reward the characteristics that are valued by society, I don't think we make progress by replacing one unidimensional system with another--although perhaps we all have more equal opportunity to be good humanitarians than we have to be good academicians.

In my book Beyond the Open Door, I suggested that we might begin gearing education to the needs of society by matching the cultivation of individual talents to societal needs in a three dimensional model patterned

after the skills needed in occupations as they are defined in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles. The United States Employment Service, after devoting some 40 years of research to the effort, has determined that the world's work can be described by three major functions--work with data, work with people, and work with things. Most jobs consist of combinations of the three functions, and each is classified in the Dictionary according to the level of skill required in each of the three areas. Thus the job of research psychologist requires very high level skills in dealing with data and low level skills in dealing with people and things. A teacher, as you might suspect, requires high level skills in working with people and data (a better word, I think, would be knowledge) but low level skills in working with things. The work of an auto mechanic is rated high on the need for knowledge and the ability to work with things, but low level skills in working with people are required.

[These three skills--specific knowledge, interpersonal skills, and the ability to work with things--it seems to me, are necessary not only to occupations, but to life in our society. Few of us want to or can avoid working with people, although some of us enjoy interpersonal relations and are more skillful at it than others. We all need knowledge about the increasingly complex world in which we live. We need to be able to read, to understand what we hear, to express ourselves orally and in writing, to have some understanding of quantitative concepts and of science. In other words, we all need those skills typically taught in school. And finally, the technological revolution has made it imperative that everyone have some understanding of how things operate.]

To date, educational institutions have concentrated on developing knowledge skills. The development of the ability to work with things has

been considered a second-rate activity and has been undertaken by vocational education. And the ability to work with people has been considered unteachable and best left to chance--although a few student personnel deans and counselors and even fewer academicians in psychology, business administration, and sociology have taken the job seriously and have attempted to devise learning experiences in interpersonal relations.

I propose that we take a broader view of education and define it as the preparation of people to live in today's world. To do this we need to forget about rigid hierarchies that rate the manipulation of ideas the greatest good while working with one's hands is for those who can't work with ideas. As for the ability to work sensitively with people, well that hasn't often made it into the credit-granting curriculum.

Specifically, my proposal is this--that the task of education be to develop the student's greatest talent to the point of excellence and that we also prepare him or her to live in today's world by developing at least minimum competence in the other two areas. Students would have the option of selecting the area or areas in which to pursue excellence. The traditional college student who has interest and ability in the manipulation of ideas would pursue excellence in the traditional college curriculum, but he would also be required to develop minimum levels of competence in working with "things" and "people." Future sculptors and future auto mechanics would pursue excellence in the manipulation of tools and materials, but would develop basic competence in traditional academic subject matter and in working with people. The development of interpersonal skills would no longer be left to extracurricular activities and to chance but would be consciously developed so that future counselors, receptionists, and social workers could pursue excellence in human relations. No skill would be

considered better or higher than any other; all are equally important to our society.

The advantage of this scheme in our egalitarian future is that it recognizes individual differences and gives more people an opportunity to make real and valued contributions. The advantage of the scheme educationally is that it permits us to establish realistic standards of performance. The best we can do at present, given our elitist form of higher education and our egalitarian function, is to be tolerant of those who cannot meet academic standards. Proposals to abolish grading are an example of this tolerance. And, I guess, if we must rate people for unidimensional talent, the abolition of grading is the only way to avoid the stigma of failure for the lower half.

My proposed reform of education casts a new light on remedial education. All of us have weaknesses--not just the so-called disadvantaged--and all of us need remediation. Consider, for example, the bright academically-oriented son of a surgeon who is elected president of the study body but is totally dependent on others to tell him how things work. He is disadvantaged when it comes to working with things, and he has many of the same symptoms as the academically disadvantaged. His life circumstances cast him in a situation where his father knows nothing about mechanics and lacks even a basic vocabulary to help his son learn. Just as there are few good books in the homes of the educationally disadvantaged, so there are few good tools in the homes of the mechanically disadvantaged. I do not propose that remediation for this high-risk mechanic should consist of learning to fix his own car if he has no interest or talent in that direction. But I do suggest that he should be exposed to some remediation in learning about how things work. There are college professors of my acquaintance whose total dependence

on others to tell them what goes on under the hood of their car is just as sad as the failure of the poorly educated to understand the cost of buying on credit. Neither is equipped to make informed decisions about important realities of their lives.

Nothing would be more salutary, I think, than to develop the kind of learning society in which the able academician but poor mechanic tutors the slow reader but good mechanic in exchange for tutoring in auto repair. Each would be teaching in his area of excellence and learning in his area of proposed competence.

Remedial education might be a fact of life for all of us, but it should not assume the tremendous importance and dreadful inequality that it does at present. Education as it exists today permits those who have high academic ability to concentrate on their strengths and ignore their weaknesses, while it condemns others to concentrate on their weaknesses and ignore their strengths. My research on New Students showed that students who did not do very well in school had little opportunity to demonstrate other talents, and they learned to think of themselves as "below-average people." In our single-minded pursuit of academic excellence in the 1950's, we even tried to stamp out the so-called frills of education such as athletics, music, and leadership activities, which gave some young people their only opportunity for recognition for outstanding performance. Fortunately, the peer culture maintained a more balanced perspective and permitted the emergence of some diversity of talent.

People need to feel that they have a speciality--that they are doing something better than most other people could do it--and society needs this diversity of talent. Our present interpretation of academic standards fails to provide for the basic needs of either the individual or of society.

There is no need for talking about lowering standards with the advent of mass education. No one wants to do that, least of all higher education's newest students who have nothing to gain from a devalued degree. What we should be talking about is raising standards and expanding the dimensions for outstanding achievement.

Those of my generation will remember a song that urged us to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. That, basically, is what I am urging. To do this we need to select people into the curricula on the basis of their strengths, not to select them out on the basis of their weaknesses.

I think all that is necessary to implement my proposed model for educational diversity is that we ask each student to select his area of excellence with the understanding that tough standards will be imposed. He can start anywhere he wants to. Remediation will be provided in all three areas. Thus a student deficient in academic skills may still elect it as his area of excellence but with the understanding that it may take longer to get his degree and that he will have to meet the same standards as others pursuing academic excellence. Grades, honors, tests, and all the other trappings used to measure performance in the academy will be applied to the area of excellence. Such measures, of course, will be appropriate to the skill being evaluated. Written tests may be appropriate in evaluating knowledge skills, for example, whereas one might use oral tests of listening and speaking for interpersonal skills and performance tests for those striving for excellence in working with things.

In the area of competence, however, there will be no grades except pass/no record. Either the student is certified as meeting minimum standards of competence or he takes remediation until he is. Since all students are exposed to all three areas, a student may find that he is doing better in

one of his areas of competence than he is in his area of excellence. He may then change his emphasis. Indeed, anyone may pursue excellence in any area once he has met competency requirements.

We already have the rudiments of the knowledge and things areas in our present academic and vocational education. But we need to recast vocational education in the image of excellence, i.e. these are not second-rate students but first rate performers in the realm of understanding and manipulating tools and materials. We have remedial programs for academic deficiencies, but we need to create remedial programs for mechanical deficiencies. To do this, we need to define what it is that the American consumer needs to know about how things work to make intelligent decisions. Some of our present "disadvantaged"--those from blue-collar homes--may proficiency out of courses in this area, while some "A" students may face an uphill struggle. Not a bad situation for either group. We would expect a large number of women in this remedial program. But since they are the primary purchasers of goods and services, that's not a bad idea either.

The area of interpersonal relations needs more new work than the other two. We need to think seriously about creating a curriculum for educating people to deal sensitively with the needs of others. Our future as an increasingly interdependent society demands a cadre of people who achieve excellence in human relations skills and it also requires some interpersonal competence on the part of all of us who are not headed for lives as hermits. Only when we begin to approach these new needs with the dedication and energy that we have used in the past for academic excellence will we begin our shift toward the society that we all know lies ahead. Our past concern for expanding the frontiers of knowledge through academic excellence has created a progressive nation able to meet the demands for new products and material

comforts, but those needs are slowing down. If the Labor Department is correct in their forecast that 70 percent of all new jobs in the years ahead will be service- and people-oriented rather than product-oriented, then we in education must begin immediately to allocate resources and energy to preparing students adequately for a world growing smaller, more densely populated, and more interdependent with each passing decade.

Fortuitously, the new needs of society are becoming clear just at the time that New Students with different interests and abilities are appearing on the college scene. If we have the good judgment to diagnose and educate these New Students in different ways from traditional students, we can meet societal and personal needs more effectively than we have been doing. Instead of working so hard to make mediocre academicians of New Students, we should be developing totally new standards and curricula-- that correct weaknesses, to be sure, but that concentrate on developing strengths.

One of the strengths of a substantial group of New Students seems to be their interest in and sensitivity to people. And some research emerging from psychology holds promise for diagnosing and developing these strengths. For some 20 years now, psychologists have been learning more about something called cognitive style. Cognition, of course, has to do with the process of learning, and cognitive styles represent individualistic ways of perceiving, remembering, thinking, and solving problems. Research demonstrates that people are sensitive to different things in the environment. Some people are socially sensitive and attuned to the human environment whereas others tend to be more analytical and task-oriented. The socially sensitive seem to depend on external cues from others to solve problems whereas people who are analytical are more independent and cued to internal signals. Interestingly

enough, researchers have found that there are physical correlates to these distinctive perceptual modes. The pioneer, and still the leading researcher on cognitive styles, is Herman Witkin whose earliest experiments involved seating a subject on a tilted chair in a tilted room. The individual was then asked to adjust the chair and his body to the true upright. Some people consistently aligned themselves to the tilt of the room whereas others ignored their immediate surroundings, using internal cues to adjust their bodies to an upright position. In another type of test, the subject was seated in a darkened room with a luminous rod in a luminous picture frame which was set aslant. His task was to set the rod to the true vertical position. Again, people were found to perform the task with remarkable consistency; some aligned the rod to the slant of the frame while others ignored the frame and set the rod upright. Furthermore, there was substantial correlation between the two tests. People who ignored the tilt of the room also ignored the slant of the frame and were described as relatively independent of their surroundings or field independent. Field dependent people, on the other hand, relied consistently on the surroundings, the room or the frame, for their orientation.

From a scientific point of view, these physical measures are of great value in the study of individual differences in perceptual modes or habits. For our purposes, however, it is the psychological correlates of the measures that are of particular interest. After some 20 years of research, Witkin can state that his observations as well as those of others "show impressively that field dependent persons are particularly sensitive and attuned to the social environment. The result, overall, is a picture of highly developed social skills (Witkin, 1973, p. 9)." If one adopts the hypothesis of responsiveness to internal vs. external cues, then it is to

be expected that the individual who is dependent on surroundings to define physical situations may also be dependent on surroundings to define social situations. And indeed, researchers have shown that field dependents pay more attention to the human environment; they spend more time looking at people's faces; they remember socially-relevant materials; they tend to avoid college majors in analytical fields such as mathematics and science and opt instead for studies concerned with people such as the social sciences and humanities (Witkin, 1973). Although field independents score higher on one factor of intelligence--that calling for analytical skills--cognitive style seems not to be related in any meaningful way to IQ. Nevertheless, field dependents appear to have more difficulty in school than field independents. I suggest that their learning problems may be related more to the orientation of the schools than to the intelligence of the learners. Learning to be responsive to people is rarely perceived as a learning task in schools, and people who are more attentive to the people around them than to the mathematics problem in front of them are very likely to appear deficient on standard measures of academic achievement.

Despite the known fact that social situations are often highly effective learning experiences, the traditional classroom is not a very social place. Beginning with their earliest school experiences, children are cautioned not to talk to their neighbors, to do their own work, and to keep their eyes on their own papers. Rarely do we permit, let alone encourage, social problem-solving. Independence has been a highly valued attribute in schools and in the broader society for as long as anyone can remember. Among the pioneers, independence was frequently necessary for survival on the frontier. Survival in these times, however, may depend more on knowing how to cooperate with others than on how to go it alone. Part of the problem in schools, I

suggest, has been the widespread belief, despite evidence to the contrary, that the teacher is the only one in the room who can help students learn. Only recently have we considered the use of peer tutors. Much to our delight, we are discovering that both the tutor and the tutored are learning more from working with each other than either might learn by lecture or through working alone--still the two most common approaches to learning in higher education. No one yet knows the full impact of the humanistic movement on education. The movement has spread with incredible speed, mostly by word of mouth from its exuberant converts, and mostly below and above college level education. We will soon find that students coming to college from elementary and secondary schools have done some work in group education and have been exposed to socially interactive learning. Boxing us in from the other side is the adult sensitivity and encounter group movement. It is now estimated that between three and six million people have been exposed to human relations training of some type--more than the national community college enrollment.

Time does not permit outlining a full curricular program for excellence in human relations but at the minimum, the program should select faculty and students who are interested and able in working with people; classrooms should stress interactive learning; a practicum should be an integral part of the educational experience, and evaluation and certification should stress the application of knowledge about groups and individuals rather than knowledge alone. Such a curricular emphasis would serve the new society well, but even more important is its potential for developing the special talents of a substantial group of New Students.

My research on New Students (Cross, 1971) shows that they have much in common with Witkin's field dependents. For research purposes, I defined

New Students as low academic achievers, believing that their educational characteristics were more relevant to us as educators than social characteristics such as race and socioeconomic status. I found that students who had not done well in school tend to be sensitive to other people, to be relatively dependent on their environments, to want more help from the college, to be socially-oriented, and to have many of the characteristics of Witkin's field dependents.

By pointing to these similarities I do not mean to imply that all New Students are field dependent nor do I imply that excellence in human relations should be limited to field dependents. Some New Students, especially those who are technically-oriented and quite sure of their vocational choices, appear to have more in common with field independents, and I suggest that they might be excellent candidates for the curriculum dealing with excellence in things.

Without going into further detail about the development of programs for excellence in working with people and things--a task I have reserved for my next book--I want here to make the point that we can maintain standards of excellence and at the same time serve both individuals and society better by thinking creatively about new curricula and new learning conditions.

I am making my proposal very specific, not because I wish to defend this particular model as the model that will solve all our problems, but because I hope to get educators to stand back and take a fresh look at some of the assumptions that we have made into eternal verities. 'Equal opportunity means more than the opportunity to develop mediocre competence in the area of someone else's strength. It means the opportunity to develop one's own talents to the point of excellence. Most people today speak of education for diversity as though it were education by diversity.

We are willing to entertain the idea that people can learn the same things by different methods or in differing amounts of time--although goodness knows we are slow to implement even those obvious facts. Even when we do implement them, it is with the implicit understanding that some students will take to traditional academic learning like a duck to water, while others will struggle to remain afloat. Nevermind that our sinking duck can run like a gazelle or fly like a swallow. What we are not yet ready to concede is that running or flying is as good as swimming and that our world is better for the existence of all three talents, appropriately used.

Community colleges, more than other colleges in existence today, have the opportunity to provide programs cultivating a diversity of excellence. The present model of higher education which is dedicated to the pursuit of academic excellence is necessary but not sufficient for our new world. It is inadequate to the future needs of society and it fails to develop the human potential of the majority of young people now in college.

If you as teachers in the community colleges truly believe that your mission is distinctive, then I suggest that now is the time to profess a renewed commitment to finding educational models that will serve New Students and the new society better.

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