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STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND THE SYSTEM *

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What is euphemistically called student unrest is, to most college administrators, the "number one" problem in American higher education today. Although everyone is talking about it, few pretend to understand it, no one knows what to do about it, and only the foolhardy would attempt to explain it. I am not planning to join the ranks of the foolhardy this afternoon. Rather, I would like to look behind the noise and the fanfare to ask whether the present eruptions are a passing phase of youthful acne or whether they are symptomatic of more fundamental disease in higher education.

One of the most frequently heard charges levelled by youth against their elders is that of hypocrisy. Webster says that hypocrisy "is pretending to be what one is not or to believe what one does not." As applied to college education, I take this to mean that we are being accused of not practicing what we preach, or of saying one thing while doing another in our college programs. From the student's frame of reference, I think the criticism is justified. But from an educator's viewpoint, I wish to plead ignorance rather than hypocrisy. Lest you question the desirability of ignorance as a characteristics of your speaker, let me hasten to explain. We profess to believe that a major -- if not the major -- purpose of education is to bring about

the fullest possible development of the student. In actual fact our educational program frequently falls far short of this goal -- not because we don't believe in it, but because we don't know how to do it. And when an organization or an institution exists that doesn't know clearly how to accomplish a goal, it rallies around its procedures rather than its purposes. If we don't know for certain where we're going, the clarification of procedures at least gives us the comfortable feeling that we know where we are. Let me give an example of how we have concentrated upon procedures rather than purposes in higher education. As you well know, after World War II, colleges and universities in this country were catapulted into the limelight of unprecedented attention. College was really important to an increasingly technological society and to thousands and thousands of students and their parents. All kinds of colleges enjoyed increased prestige, and a great variety of institutions talked of excellence in education. Unfortunately, the striving for excellence in most colleges focused upon procedures rather than upon purposes, and we began to talk of raising standards as a substitute for improving performance. The first procedures to come under scrutiny in the institution striving for prestige were the admissions practices. It is a common-sense fact as well as a demonstrated research finding that if you start with smarter students, you will graduate smarter students, and smarter students are more likely to enter

graduate school, which, it is assumed, reflects credit upon the undergraduate institution. More obscure to common-sense reasoning as well as to research investigation is the raising of standards which results in a scramble for increasing the number of PhDs on the faculty. No one has ever demonstrated a consistent relationship between the possession of a PhD and teacher effectiveness. Furthermore, it is not at all clear that the quality of scholarly contribution is associated with the PhD degree. These are, however, examples of procedures that can be looked to in the absence of a direct pathway to the higher purpose of education.

I should like to return to the more basic consideration of purpose in higher education. Let me make it clear that while I regard the development of the minds and values of students as the fundamental purpose of all education, I would ask our more impatient students to consider the fact that student development is not the sole purpose of the university. The advancement of knowledge and service to society are obviously crucial tasks of the total educational community. As the land grant institution has distinguished itself by providing research and service to the agrarian society, so the urban university must assume increased responsibility for the solution of the massive problems now facing our urban communities. Personally, I have no criticism of the recognition and salary accorded a distinguished research specialist in urban affairs -- even if he never teaches an undergraduate class. On the other hand,

I depore the fact that that same recognition and salary is not accorded the master teacher -- even if he never conducts research or publishes a book. There is much to be done, and there are many ways to go about achieving the purposes of an educational institution.

At this point in time, we don't know a lot through research about maximizing the potential that exists within human beings. We are accumulating a great deal of evidence that our schools and colleges are not doing a very good job of it.

Because it is such an explosive topic right now, I'd like to be able to talk about what education has done for the black student or for the thousands upon thousands of urban students who are flocking to the community colleges -- the first in their blue-collar families to attend college. Unfortunately, we are only beginning to tackle these problems but we do have plenty of research evidence to indicate that students who do not "fit" in our traditional system of education are penalized by it. This research is, I think, relevant to the problems faced by an established and traditional system of education which finds itself in the midst of new demands.

Let me use as an example the creative student, who, because he frequently fails to conform to our educational model, seems not to realize his potential in our colleges.

T. R. McConnell, founder and former chairman of the Center, placed the problem in perspective almost 10 years ago when he wrote,

"At times I am not very sanguine about the desire or the ability of our educational institutions to nurture the talents of their most gifted and creative students. Too often, the college attempts to force its exceptional students to conform, not only to accepted customs and attitudes of the community, but also to conventional habits of mind. Most of us are uncomfortable with rebellious intellect and fearful of its consequences, rather than hopeful of the results of its revolt. Therefore, I suspect that all along the way we freeze out the unconventional and creative minds, retaining the dutiful, unimaginative, compliant, competent, and unresourceful grade getters who will become, in turn, the scholars who will sanction the same behavior in future students. Now and then, fortunately for art, letters, and science, a few mavericks slip through the screen, or quietly internalize their conflict with the stereotyped academic environment while outwardly conforming well enough with the mores to meet the faculty's requirements in greater or lesser degree. But I wonder most about the creative minds who find this environment utterly uncongenial and leave it forthwith. Some of them, perhaps, will realize their potentialities outside the Academy, as artists and writers always have. But others will have been lost to science and scholarship, others who could have brought new light and given new directions to man's long and often weary quest for self-realization."

These observations were before the Berkeley of 1964, the Columbia of 1968, or the San Francisco State which may or may not be in 1969.

Let me repeat one sentence because it has great relevance for today.

"Most of us are uncomfortable with rebellious intellect and fearful of its consequences, rather than hopeful of the results of its revolt."

If there is any hope to emerge from the present student revolts -- and I think there is -- it may lie in forcing educators to think and to study and to experiment until we find the methods that assist the individual to self-realization.

The student who appears best satisfied with "the system" is the stereotype of "college material", i. e. the academically competent student who made good grades in high school and who proceeded without major problems through the traditional four year college. Research from a number of sources indicate that a great variety of students who do not conform to the pattern may not be well-served by traditional education. To take a few examples, students identified through research as potentially creative are significantly more likely to leave our institutions of higher education than are students without this characteristic pattern of attitudes and interests. At the high school level, students who pursue our academic ideal by entering college are the most likely to rate their high school education helpful, whereas those who go immediately into employment are the least satisfied with their preparation for their futures. At the junior college level, those students who later transfer to private universities which are the prototype of our academic models, rated their junior college education higher than did junior college students who later transferred to technical institutes which represent a greater departure from the stereotyped model for higher education. To cite a well known fact, high school girls are more likely than boys to care about what their teachers think of them and to conform to teacher expectations -- and they are rewarded by the system with considerably higher grades, but they do not score noticeably higher on tests of ability.

When all of these research observations are put together, we are forced to ask ourselves the difficult question of whether the educational system is so oriented toward a singular model of academic performance that there is no room for individuals to develop strength in other directions.

Let's take a closer look at the research on the potentially creative student as representative of a type of individual who does not seem to thrive -- indeed, he seems not to survive -- in our colleges.

Contrary to popular opinion, a creative person does not necessarily score exceptionally high on tests of intellectual ability. Dr. Donald MacKinnon, Director of the Institute for Personality Assessment and Research at the University of California and a scientist who has specialized in the study of creativity, states that, "It simply is not true that the more intelligent person is necessarily the more creative one ... if a person has the minimum intelligence required for mastery of a field of knowledge, whether he performs creatively or banally in that field will be crucially determined by non-intellectual factors..."

The Center has been interested in studying those non-intellectual factors, and what we find is that students who show evidence of having an open, critical, and flexible turn of mind and who seek novel and complicated solutions in preference to simple and conventional ones, are more likely to drop out of college than are other students. There is some evidence to suggest that in most of the institutions studied through

research at the Center and elsewhere, there is a tendency to systematically weed out the non-conforming, inventive, innovative scholar. Dr. Benson Snyder, Psychiatrist and Chief at M.I. T., has recently completed a study in which he reported that M.I. T. was "losing three times as many students who as freshmen preferred to try out new solutions, 'fool around' with ideas or take cognitive risks, as it is students preferring a well ordered life with tangible results."

When students indicating a preference for complex experiences did remain at M.I. T., they were more likely to be found in the School of Science by their senior year than in the School of Engineering. There was one notable exception to this, however, and it may provide a clue for educators interested in nurturing creativity. The greatest increase in complexity scores from the freshman to the senior year occurred among students in a particular major where there was a design project course in the junior year in which the professor literally told students, "Let yourselves go; make a mistake." In our high pressure system of education today I fear that many students think that the price of "making a mistake" can be too costly. To take but one example, many students hesitate to venture into fields with unfamiliar subject matter lest the choice of a few "wrong" courses dash all hopes for graduate school. Some colleges, recognizing that intellectual adventure requires the courage to be found wrong, permit students to take some courses for which they may be ill prepared, without being graded.

The research on creatives may suggest some other implications for educational practice. Dr. MacKinnon, in his research on creative architects, scientists, and mathematicians studied their early childhood experiences to see if he could find some common elements in the homes of these outstanding individuals. He found that there was a clear attitude on the part of the parents that fostered independence. MacKinnon noted that,

"... parents did not leave the life space of the child unstructured ... There existed clear standards of conduct and ideas as to what was right and wrong, but at the same time there was an expectation, if not requirement, of active exploration and the internalization of a framework of personal conduct. Discipline was almost always consistent and predictable. In most cases there were rules, family standards, and parental injunctions which were known explicitly by the children and seldom infringed. Thus there appears to have been both structure and freedom which carried with it expectations of reasonable and responsible action ..."

Dr. MacKinnon ventured the conclusion from this research evidence that,

"... the college or university that can create an atmosphere similar to that of the homes of those who were to become so highly creative would contribute importantly to nurturing the creative potential of its students. And this ... is different from the kind of unstructured campus which some seek today, a campus on which there would be no rules to regulate the manner, time, and place for the activities appropriate to college life."

Although I am citing the research bearing on a particular type of individual that higher education is serving poorly, I am also advancing the hypothesis that much of this research has a direct bearing on higher

education's failure to work effectively at its stated purpose of assisting the individual student to maximum self-realization.

Research tells us how things are, or to use the popular phrase -- science tells it like it is. While research suggests hypotheses for further tests, it does not by itself, prescribe cures for the ailments and deficiencies of higher education. For that we must look to sensitivity, imagination -- perhaps to philosophy and surely to theory.

Theory, in education and psychology, is immature and poorly developed, but some principles seem to be emerging which may provide some guidance. Nevitt Sanford is a teacher and researcher who has attempted to provide some theoretical bases for education. He prescribes that, "The institution which would lead an individual toward greater development must, . . . present him with strong challenges, appraise accurately his ability to cope with these challenges and offer him support when they become overwhelming."

Peter Madison, Professor of Education at the University of Arizona, seems to be taking much the same point of view when he states that,

"At the most general level, it can be said that development takes place to the degree that a person makes an emotional commitment to a developmentally challenging situation and to the degree that the ensuing challenges are within his present learning capacities."

The application of these theoretical constructs to the development of an educational program for a college is not a simple task. How do

you know how much freedom is required to challenge the student to grow, and how much structure is needed to keep him from being overwhelmed?

Let me be the thousandth to admit that adequate guidelines to maximizing student development do not yet exist, but let's explore some theoretical formulations that may prove fruitful. At the most general level there appear to be two primary types of theories regarding human development. One is fundamentally a theory of stability; the other a theory of change. No major writer has made a significant contribution to both. Theories of stability, in their simplest terms, emphasize the homeostatic principle which states that the organism grows and develops through a constant effort to reduce tensions and to restore balance. In other words, these theorists would take the position that stability is comfortable, and the human organism would seek this state. But several important writers in the field of human development are postulating theories of change in which human beings actively seek challenge. Their stretch is more important than their grasp, so to speak. Most theories of change propose that there are stages for the development of the self, or the ego, or the personality. For some theorists, such as Erickson who is strongly psychoanalytic in his orientation, the personality unfolds through gradual diversification and differentiation. His model is essentially embryonic. In fetal development the organs emerge and develop, each at its critical time. The primary characteristic

of each of his eight stages of personality development exists from birth, but each has its own period of ascendancy. The harm to personality development occurs when disturbance takes place during the critical period for the emergence of a particular stage.

In contrast to Erickson's epigenetic model, is Loevinger's hierarchic model in which she maintains that the ego is not like an embryo in which different organs are predominant at different times, but rather that development proceeds from the simple to the complex -- each stage based on the preceding one and preparing for the next; no stage can be skipped, and the final level of personality development depends upon how many stages have been completed successfully. This concept of personality development rejects Erickson's concept of age-related stages. Loevinger maintains that most college students have reached a level of personality development which is somewhere between what she calls the conformist and conscientious stages which in her hierarchical model are the fourth and fifth stages of personality development.

In an attempt to understand the personality development of the college student it may be useful to describe some of Loevinger's stages along with some relevant research findings.

In order to lay some background and because some college students are at Loevinger's third stage let me quote from her descriptions of the

stages of development most characteristic of the college student, starting with the third or opportunistic stage. At this stage, writes Loevinger, "it is understood that there are rules, but they are obeyed in terms of immediate advantage. Thus, the morality is purely an expedient one. What is bad is to be caught. Interpersonal relations are manipulative and exploitive, but there is a marked shift away from dependents. The small child says, 'Do it by self' and the adolescent at this stage says, 'Who needs them?' Conscious preoccupation is with control and advantage, domination, deception, getting the better of, etc. Life is a zero-sum game; what you win, I lose."

This is a rather vivid description and probably most of us know some students at this level of development. But it is equally important to Loevinger to observe that we know adults at this level also. More college students are at the level of the conformist stage. "At this stage," says Loevinger, "the rules are partially internalized. They are obeyed just because they are the rules. The chief sanction for transgression is shame, contrasting with the opportunistic stage preceding which is often described ... as shameless. Genuine interpersonal reciprocity is possible now; reciprocity is, after all, the Golden Rule. In many cases, however, the mutual trust is extended only to a narrowly conceived in-group. There may be strong prejudice against various out-groups conceived in stereotyped terms. Interpersonal relations are seen primarily in terms of actions rather than of feelings and motives.

Conscious preoccupation is with material things, with reputation and status, with appearance, and with adjustment. References to inner-feelings are typically stereotyped, banal, and often moralistic."

Loevinger's description of this stage is consistent with much of the research on college freshmen. The Bennington studies of Ted Newcomb, and the Vassar studies of Nevitt Sanford and virtually every study since has shown that there is, for most students, a decrease in authoritarianism from the freshman to the senior year in college.

Nevitt Sanford's research description of the Vassar freshman sounds very much like Jane Loevinger's theoretical description of the conformist stage of ego development. Sanford noted that the Vassar freshman tended to defer to authority and to depend upon external support for her system of values. She was likely to be strict with herself and with others, ready to meet the requirements and conform to the prevailing standards of behavior -- and inclined to be somewhat intolerant of those who did not.

The Trent-Medsker research of the Center showed that the greatest changes to take place during the college years occurred in the personality area of nonauthoritarianism. Of the 10,000 high school graduates studied, those who went on to graduate from college showed a marked increase in flexibility, tolerance, objectivity and a lack of dependency on rules and rituals for dealing with ideas, objects, and people. Those who went

to work or became housewives immediately after high school graduation, however, actually moved in the other direction; they became more rigid in their thinking and more authoritarian than they had been upon graduation from high school.

From Loevinger's point of view, the Medsker-Trent data could be interpreted to show two things: 1) That students who had reached a higher level of personality development were more likely to go on to college, and 2) that college students made more progress in ego-development than non-college youth.

Of some interest to the present scene is Sanford's observation of the authoritarian tendency to think in rigid categories -- to hate hypocrisy and to demand that things be clear and uncomplicated. Vassar seniors, as well as most seniors studied in a great variety of research studies since the 1940's, move away from this authoritarian syndrome. Rather than demanding that things be black or white, seniors are better able to accept the grays of this life.

Seniors, in the research studies, appear to be moving toward Loevinger's fifth or conscientious stage of ego development. Loevinger's description of this stage states that, "Morality has been internalized. Inner moral imperatives take precedence over group-sanctioned rules. The sanction for transgression is guilt. Interpersonal relations are seen in terms of feelings and traits rather than actions; they become

more vivid, intensive, and meaningful than in earlier periods. Conscious preoccupation is with obligations, ideals, traits, and achievement as measured by inner standards rather than by recognition alone. Conduct is seen not simply as a series of actions, but as a set of enduring propensities . . . Capacity for self-criticism characterizes this stage, its absence the conformist stage. Self-criticism may, indeed, mediate the transition . . . Conformists, as a group, tend to see themselves in socially acceptable terms, though they may also report accurately specific symptoms; conscientious persons, or at least some of them, tend to view themselves hypercritically."

This theoretical description sounds much like research descriptions of many college seniors. Certainly the research on student attitudes and values appears to verify Loevinger's formulation that the conscientious stage represents a higher level of ego development than does the conformist stage. Most of the recent research shows a tendency for students in general to move from tangible extrinsic rewards to more intangible intrinsic values. Freshmen, for example, are more concerned than are seniors with the importance of grades, vocational preparation, high-paying jobs, and other symbols of material success. In other words, seniors tend to be more concerned than freshman with inner standards and ideals. Her emphasis upon interpersonal relationships at this stage of development is

confirmed by the Harvard study of Student Development in which Stanley King reported Harvard seniors giving greatly increased attention to interpersonal concerns. Despite the intellectual and academic emphasis at Harvard, students placed considerable emphasis upon their feelings of growth in emotional and social areas. These concerns were more critical to Harvard students than were the acquisition of facts and the sharpening of intellectual skills. These research findings tend to support Erikson's theoretical concepts of identity formation and the achievement of intimacy as adolescent and early adult stages of development.

Although Loevinger reports few college students who have reached the autonomous stage of development, we may all know a few students at Loevinger's autonomous stage of development and we see streaks of it in many students. She describes the sixth or autonomous stage as one in which "impulse control is no longer a problem at this late stage of maturity. The characteristic moral issue is coping with inner conflict, conflicting duties, conflicting needs, conflict between needs and duties, and so on. Such conflicts, although quite evidently present at earlier periods, including the conscientious one, are not squarely and consciously coped with earlier. Along with one's own conflicts comes greater toleration for those choosing other solutions than one's own, in contrast with the moral condemnation frequent in conscientious and conformist stages. Interpersonal relations remain intense, they

involve a recognition of inevitable mutual interdependence, and a crucial addition, they involve the recognition of other people's need for autonomy. Thus, a typically conscientious mother feels obliged to prevent her children from making mistakes, whereas a typical autonomous mother recognizes their need to learn from their own mistakes."

To put this in perspective I shall describe Loevinger's highest stage of development despite her contention that in normal groups such persons rarely appear -- so rarely in fact that it is difficult to get data about them. In the highest or seventh stage of personality development, "the person proceeds beyond coping with conflict to reconciliation of conflicting demands, and, where necessary, renunciation of the unobtainable, beyond toleration to the cherishing of individual differences, beyond role differentiation to the achievement of a sense of integrated identity."

In conclusion, I'd like to turn for a moment to what all of this theory and research implies for education. Basic to Loevinger's conception of personality development, is her adherence to a theory of change which postulates that human beings seek a level of complexity just a little higher than what they can handle easily. This notion has much in common with Sanford's prescription that for optimal development, the college should attempt to create an environment which is challenging.

or which requires the student to stretch a little in order to handle it.

The extent of challenge to be offered depends in large measure upon the developmental status of the students and is a matter that must be developed for and by each educational community in accordance with its own needs. Creating the flexibilities and freedoms along with the structure referred to by MacKinnon, Sanford, and Madison is not an easy task. We know that the research message is loud and clear that the entering students of colleges and universities throughout the country differ tremendously in ability, maturity, and past experience. The freedom that would result in desirable growth on one campus might well end in emotional crises on another. In general, students seem to possess an uncanny ability to select colleges that appear to fit their backgrounds and needs. In the same way that a highly able student is likely to select a college with high academic standards, a student who has had considerable freedom and has learned to handle independence is likely to select a less protective college environment than the student who has led a more restricted existence. It seems reasonable to assume that not all students will develop and mature at the same rates nor through the same experiences. The system needs to offer the flexibilities that will permit students to reach self-realization through a variety of pathways.

The Student Development Study underway at Kansas State University seems to me a potentially important and exciting attempt to provide some guidelines for maximizing student development at this university.