

## Dealing with Diversity: The Challenge of Teaching Today

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- ◇ 이 글은 “Change” Vol. 15, No. 6(September, 1983)에 게 ◇
- ◇ 재된 論文으로, 필자는 이 글에서 앞으로 당분간 미국의 大 ◇
- ◇ 學生 數는 점차로 감소될 전망이지만 大學生의 연령과 배 ◇
- ◇ 경 및 능력에 있어서는 더욱더 多樣化될 것이라 豫測하고 ◇
- ◇ 있습니다. 1980년대의 高等教育은 어떻게 이에 대처해 나가 ◇
- ◇ 야 할 것인가에 대한 필자의 주장은 우리에게 주는 示唆點 ◇
- ◇ 이 크리라 생각합니다. ……………〈編輯者 註〉 ◇

### I

Dealing with diversity is a major problem in higher education today, and there is every evidence that it is going to get worse before it gets better. Until we can find some way to deal effectively with diversity in human learning, we are ill-equipped to meet the educational challenges of the 1980s. Our inability to cope with student diversity has not been apparent so far because diversity is easily accommodated in periods of expansion. It's easy enough to add new people, new programs, even new colleges to do the new job. By and large, add-on expansion does not complicate anyone's life because new people are added to do new things, and no one has to increase his workload or change his habits.

The double add-on model can be a little more complicated. It is represented by a sequence of demands. The first demand might be for open admissions, which is followed by a recognition of the need for developmental studies. Still, as long as resources are unrestricted, everyone is happy. Open admissions students are welcomed; new counselors are added; developmental specialists are hired. As long as the add-on model is adhered to, there is no problem. If, however, the add-on model breaks down and the workload of regular faculty increases or there is a need for a change in the habits of people who were not hired to do the new job, then there is increasing dissatisfaction.

I attribute much of the low morale and disaffection of college faculties today to the breakdown of the add-on model. It is a model designed to handle diversity when there is volume to go along with it. It is also expensive. Today's administrators find it hard to justify new staff and new programs when student volume is not increasing. Diversity is continuing to increase, however, while volume is steady or falling. The add-on model is no longer appropriate and the workload generated by diversity is working its way into the

typical college classroom, creating a demand for change and leaving frustration and unhappiness in its wake.

The problem can be illustrated through the use of an analogy. For some years now, we have been busy building new access ramps onto the superhighway of postsecondary education. When the new traffic threatens to cause congestion in any area, we simply add a new lane to the superhighway. There is no real problem as long as the new traffic is traveling at roughly the same rate of speed and going in the same direction as the existing traffic. The problem comes when the new access ramps pour a vastly increased diversity of vehicles and drivers out onto the highway.

What we have on the postsecondary highway now is, to say the least, colorful in its variety. There are VWs and Cadillacs and Peterbilt trucks; old clunkers, sleek and powerful race cars, stock cars carrying an incredible mix of mismatched parts; and lately a few classy vintage antiques have appeared on the scene. Added to the variety of vehicles, we have slow drivers who want to travel in fast lanes, drivers whose only past experience is on country roads, drivers who can't read road signs, drivers whose attention is completely occupied elsewhere, and drivers who don't know where they are going.

Until this diversity forced itself to our attention, there were few crossroads at which colleges were forced to slow down, read the signs, and contemplate new directions. Now, however, the highway seems full of signs reading "caution," "yield," "slow down," and "do not enter." There is concern now that colleges, especially community colleges, may have taken on more than they can handle.

## II

Let us assume, in the first instance, that we are not going to close access ramps—at least not on any broad national scale. There is a move, however, toward setting up vehicle inspection stations on the access ramps. A majority of states now have some form of minimum high school competency standards, some of which deny a diploma to students with grossly inadequate basic skills. These inspection stations will presumably screen out vehicles that have no hope of traveling any significant distance on the educational highway without breaking down. But the standards of the inspection stations are so minimal and the whole endeavor subject to so much criticism that it is doubtful that such screening will do much to alleviate the congestion. Moreover, tightening high school graduation standards has little impact on adults, who constitute the fastest growing segment of higher education, and represent even greater diversity in educational backgrounds and goals than eighteen-year-olds.

How can faculty members deal more adequately with diversity in their classrooms? That is going to be difficult. The assigned task of the classroom teacher is comparable to that of a traffic cop who is asked to meet twenty assorted vehicles of widely varying speed and states of repair and to escort them in a convoy to the next exit. They must all stay together throughout the trip; all must start and exit at the same time; and no one may stop along the way for repair or rest without going back to the beginning and joining the next convoy. That image is roughly comparable to taking a group of twenty diverse students at the beginning of the semester, insisting that they all move at the same pace through the same subject matter, exiting "on time" (our time, not necessarily theirs) without compromising anyone's academic standards.

If the convoy system worked, it would in fact ease congestion on the highway. There is no big problem in escorting twenty cars, all in good condition, all traveling at 50 miles per hour, all with drivers attending to the task, to the next exit. The problem increases in direct proportion to the amount of variation in the convoy. Anyone who is or has been a classroom teacher should feel some empathy with the problem. It is patently unrealistic to expect anyone to escort a diverse group of travelers to a common exit in a predetermined amount of time. And yet that is what we expect of college teachers who are using a highway designed for the more homogeneous groups that characterized higher education in an earlier era.

Some colleges have devised ways of dealing with this diversity, and they work—or at least they help when diversity is not too great and the resources are not too limited. Unfortunately, both of the common methods for dealing with diversity lead to increased costs. Nevertheless, it is possible either to reduce the size of the group or add more personnel to handle the diversity.

One of the more effective methods of remedial education is to teach in very small groups so that individual diagnosis, prescription, and personal attention are possible. A larger group can be maintained by adding specialized services such as counselors, financial aid officers, peer tutors, basic skills specialists and the like. Both of these methods have been used extensively in dealing with diversity of learning ability in open admissions colleges. But since both methods lead to increased costs because of the smaller teacher-student ratio, they are not likely to be looked upon with favor in the years ahead. As almost everyone knows by now, the first things to go in a budget crunch are specialized services and the so-called luxury of small classes.

### III

Our educational system was designed in a different era to serve a different student clientele. There is no end in sight to long term and increasing diversity. Things will get worse not better for almost every college in the country. We have reached the point where tinkering with an outmoded design for education will almost certainly prove inadequate. Students can, should, and must assume more responsibility for their own learning. We can no longer afford escort service, and even if we could, the escort notion violates so much of the research on effective learning that we must find other alternatives. Educators can and should spend less time escorting convoys and more time marking the route, helping students determine destinations, providing maps of the alternatives for getting there, diagnosing and repairing learning problems, and in general designing a new educational system that can handle student diversity at reasonable cost.

Let us look at what is wrong with the escort notion and how these problems might be corrected. In the first place, the final destination is all too frequently unspecified by the teacher and unknown by the students. It is as though all agreed to ride along on the highway and get off at the end of an hour, rather than at some predetermined destination. The correction seems obvious. Students should know the objectives of the class, not just in terms of ground to be covered, but in terms of where they will be when they exit. It is no more reasonable to expect a student to be satisfied when told that the class will read sonnets than it is to expect a highway traveler to be satisfied when told that the convoy will pass Howard Johnson's and get gas at Shell. It is outcomes, not mere path-

ways traversed, that are the destinations of most learners.

This is not to say that the ground covered and the stops made are irrelevant to the final destination. The teacher has every right and responsibility to plan a route that leads to the destination. The point is that too many teachers are specific about the route and vague about the destination.

As we move into the learning society there will be increasing pressures to define destinations and to offer alternative pathways to reaching them. Nontraditional alternatives are already available to adult learners in virtually every state in the Union. Indeed, off-campus locations, flexible scheduling, credit for prior learning, and a host of other alternatives to the 50-minute class period are so common now that the term "nontraditional" may still mean historically unusual, but it does not mean uncommon anymore, even in traditional institutions.

What do these alternate routes mean to higher education?

There is heavy criticism that people using the alternate routes are coming up short of the destination. If the complaints are to be either answered or corrected, destinations must be clearly specified so that we know whether someone using the alternative of, say, home study via television, arrived at the same destination as someone attending class on campus three times a week.

If alternative routes are available to adults learning off-campus, shouldn't they also be available to those studying on campus? We know that students have different learning styles and that they learn from different forms of instruction. There is little excuse anymore for a department of reasonable size to offer only lecture-discussion modes of learning. Three instructors teaching the same subject might better offer one section of self-paced instruction, one emphasizing interpersonal interaction, and one a traditional lecture discussion, than to offer three sections of similar format. Teachers, after all, have different cognitive styles too, and dividends might be expected if teachers selected a mode of instruction at which they excelled rather than one that needs no defense for mediocre performance simply because it is familiar and therefore accepted in higher education.

In conclusion, I want to give specific attention to what is wrong with the old escort notion of education for the two groups of students that are the primary cause of increasing student diversity. I distinguish between "new students" and nontraditional students because the educational needs of the two groups are really quite different. In *Beyond the Open Door*, I defined new students as recent high school graduates who ranked in the lowest academic third of their class. They are typically low achievers from the lower socio-economic levels who lack academic self-confidence and achievement motivation. Nontraditional students, in contrast, are adult part-time learners, and research shows that at the present time, adults who return to college are, by and large, the privileged classes. They tend to be disproportionately young adults in their thirties, who are above average students with good motivation for upward mobility and self-improvement.

There has been a strong tendency in recent years to increase the dependency of both of these groups on professional educators. While I don't deny the apparent dependency of new students on teachers and counselors for direction and externally imposed discipline, we do new students no service unless we make a conscious effort to turn the responsibility for their learning over to them. The ultimate purpose of the human support efforts of developmental education should be to build selfconfidence and to lead students to the discovery that, as a result of their *own* efforts, they can succeed. The objective of the instruc-

tional programs of developmental education should be to build the basic skills that will set students free and enable them to achieve a measure of academic independence.

The dependency situation is somewhat different for nontraditional learners. What we seem to be doing in the case of adults is urging them to validate their learning through enrolling in college classes. Thus we run the risk of making formerly independent, self-directed adult learners increasingly dependent on formal education to tell them what, where, when, and how to learn. There would be no conflict between college instruction and the lifelong learning movement *if* the classroom instruction were geared to introducing learners to the resources, methods, and self-discipline to pursue self-directed learning. The fact is, however, that most classroom teachers are still merely conducting convoys without teaching students how to define their destinations, how to locate learning materials, how to select alternatives from a good map of the terrain, and how to evaluate their progress.

As we move into the learning society, it is especially important that we reorient the educational system to create autonomous learners looking to us for roadsigns rather than escort service—if not for pedagogical reasons, then surely for economic ones. In 1930, there were ten workers for every retired person in the United States. By 1950, the ratio was seven and a half to one; by 1970, it was five and a half to one; by the year 2020, it is expected to be four and a half to one. And if one adds dependent children to retired people, there will be fewer than two workers for every nonworker in the society in the beginning of the twenty-first century. As the Social Security Agency has found out and the health and education services are about to discover, we cannot afford a society in which huge numbers of nonworkers are increasingly dependent on a relatively small number of workers. It may not be necessary to change the ratio of workers to nonworkers; our society probably can afford to give more attention to the quality of life and to the increased enjoyment of leisure time. It will be necessary, however, to promote the independence of nonworkers for the good of society as well as for the good of individuals.

The health professions are already working toward much heavier emphasis on preventive medicine which places more 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. There is an ancient proverb which says, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; give him a fishing rod and you feed him for the rest of his life." Our educational proverb might read, "Teach students subject matter, and you give them perishable information; teach them how to learn, and you give them knowledge and independence for the rest of their lives."

The challenge of the 1980s is not to provide escort service for students who want and need to travel different routes, but rather to provide the roadways, the maps, and the services to help students find their way in the Learning Society. \*

#### Note

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