

PRINCIPLES OF STUDENT PERSONNEL WORK:
A BASIS FOR NEW DIRECTIONS

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I believe it is wise and prudent that an examination of new directions, desirable in the development of counseling in high schools and colleges, be preceded by a re-examination and restatement of many of the vector forces bearing on the future of all post-high school education in America. By way of introduction, then, let me name a number of vector forces currently competing with each other to determine the resultant direction and momentum of future developments. Some of these forces will be widely familiar, but they are nonetheless potent forces which will both expand and restrict what we develop in future years.

I refer in the first instance to the greatly increased and increasing demand of individual students and their parents, as well as job requirements themselves, for some type of post-high school education for most students. Education is increasingly widely accepted in America, particularly in the low economic classes, as the instrumentality for raising the cultural and economic status of the individual and of his family. That is, education is largely valued as a necessary prerequisite for a higher status in life, as well as increased income for "better living," which we largely define as universal creature comforts - travel, entertainment and the like. But we also, increasingly, plan, require and hope for more education beyond high school for increased intellectual activities and for more self-initiated continuing education through individual reading. In a very profound sense education, then, is viewed in America as the

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instrumentality for the improvement of the human situation. To be sure, it may well be that education cannot produce all the miracles that are presently expected of it; nevertheless, we educators must give consideration and weight to such high expectations, at least until they are proved to be unattainable by many individuals.

In the second place, we need, therefore, reconcile ourselves to an increased heterogeneity of enrolled students in terms of interests, expectations and abilities, who will demand as their "natural right" some form of post-high school education. It obviously follows that we shall need increasingly to differentiate curricula as to interests, expectations and abilities. In other words, post-high school education is no longer to be limited to the academically talented, but will be "demanded" and anticipated by those who possess other types of talents.

In the third place, parallel with and sometimes uncoordinated with the extended "training" of talents of all kinds, there is a growing commitment in American society to "general education" for all citizens up to the level of their capacity to comprehend the divisive issues of a democratic society. Our founding fathers, particularly Jefferson, based their hopes for a democratic society upon an enlightened electorate. And it is a rough measure of how far we have advanced in our understanding of the societal utility of the educating of its citizens to perform their participating roles in decision-making, that we have moved far beyond Jefferson's concept that a common school learning of three grades would be sufficient for the voting masses.¹

Still another emerging vector force, which will perhaps be more explicit in future years, is exemplified by that magnificent volume, edited by Nevitt Sanford, *THE AMERICAN COLLEGE*.² One should read

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1. Thomas Jefferson, "Plan for Organizing Education in Virginia," 1779 in the BIENNIAL REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION FOR VIRGINIA, 1900-1901, pp. lxx-lxxv.
 2. Nevitt Sanford (ed.), *THE AMERICAN COLLEGE: A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL INTERPRETATION OF HIGHER LEARNING*, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York, 1962.

this heavy tome after familiarizing himself with the roots of this new formula for education as exposed in Cremin's *THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SCHOOL*,³ the story of the liberal movement in American education from the early nineteenth century to the organizational demise of the Progressive Education Association. President Fels of Bennington College characterized Sanford's volume in these words: "The reason *THE AMERICAN COLLEGE* presents a formidable challenge to collegiate educators is that it now calls upon them to face up to both Dewey and Freud, and, except for a handful of them, they haven't yet faced up to Dewey."⁴ Going far beyond the pioneering study of the needs for fuller personality development, or as Sanford delicately refers to it, "impulse control," the many authors of this stimulating volume explore and formulate a basic restructure of the mission of the liberal arts college. Many educators will resist such reformulation and will insist that the college should confine itself to the historical mission of intellectual development. A re-examination of history, as exemplified by Leonard's little volume,⁵ will recall the fact that colonial colleges originated in America not for intellectual development alone, but also for the cultivation of morals, manners and dress in the rough frontier society of those days. History has indeed been edited by many who advocate the restriction of the mission of the schools and colleges to the intellectual development of its students. But everyone must now reckon with Sanford's contention that "impulse control," or full personality development in a profound sense and not in the superficiality of some of the "progressive" educators, must be weighed in the many competing and conflicting forces which will determine the future of education, both in the colleges and, indeed, in all post-high school education.

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3. Lawrence A. Cremin, *THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SCHOOL*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1961.
 4. William C. Fels, *SATURDAY REVIEW*, February 17, 1962, p.172.
 5. Eugenie A. Leonard, *ORIGINS OF PERSONNEL SERVICES IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1956.

There is still another vector force slowly emerging, sometimes forgotten, but which is historically firmly established in Western culture as one of the most important foundations of every type of education. This is the Renaissance concept of the full development of the potentiality of the individual. President Pusey restated this Renaissance concept in these words: "The teacher's special job is to nurture in young people the desire to extend themselves, and to help them, with their minds and wills, to grow beyond competence into full humanity."⁶

But we Americans have added a major historic change of this Renaissance concept of the full development of potentiality. We now wish to extend this privilege of full development beyond the historic elite of Western Europe, to all students, to the limit of their potential. No longer is full education of potentiality to be limited to the cultural or intellectual elite; but increasingly we seek to make education available to all, including those economically deprived and those ethnically restricted. Indeed, our current motto for education in our society is, "more of the good things in life for more persons." And we now define "good things" not merely in terms of creature comforts, but also in terms of intellectual and cultural maturity as well.

With these several identified vector forces as backdrop, let me turn now to one of the many, many unfinished obligations of educators. Having now spent the last half century or more attending to the development of potentiality in those deprived by physical limitations, psychological restrictions, and to a less completed extent those who are culturally and ethnically deprived, we now are beginning to turn our inventive creativeness to the high-ability, under-achieving student. President Conant has made us acutely aware of the urgent need of full development of the potentiality of the high-ability student, and now that we have at long last turned our attention to this neglected segment of our school population we discover, to our

6. Nathan M. Pusey, "The Exploding World of Education," FORTUNE, 1955, Vol. 52, pp. 96-97.

embarrassment, that many of those of high potential are underachieving.⁷ In fact, in my own institution in the period from 1923-1928, 48% of the top tenth (in ability and high school achievement) of the freshman class in liberal arts received less than a B average in their first year in college. In 1954-55, the percentage had dropped to 42%. One wonders, in our current frenetic effort to recruit more high-ability students to go to college, whether we are not ignoring the very high rate of underachievement of those currently enrolled!⁸

I do not here attempt to review the extensive literature on the underachieving student, but I will say that I come away from reading that literature with a puzzled reaction and some tentative formulations. In the first place, underachievement is probably a "way of living" symptomatic of an emotional problem of complex nature, possibly originating in either home or school, with the two forces reinforcing the aspiration to underachieve. A second tentative formulation is that this way of living, at reduced output, is probably a phenomenon originating early in life and possibly firmly fixed as a personality pattern before one graduates from high school. To be sure, the phenomenon can occur in college when an easily-achieving superior student in high school transfers to a much higher level of intellectual competition in college and for the first time discovers that half-hearted efforts no longer produce high grades. Such may well be the phenomena at work in the case of the statistics I quote from my own institution.

7. J.B. Conant, THE MODERN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1959.

8. In a 1960 speech before the staff of the U.S. Office of Education, Mr. Conant commented that counselors should "urge" high ability students to enroll in difficult high school subjects and presumably to plan to go to college. But now that we have at long last turned to the problem of the high-ability student, we discover a very serious deficiency, "Why do so many high ability students underachieve?"

Recently I came across a very persuasive hypothesis by Friedenberg, concerning the basic "cause" of underachievement, especially in high schools. In an intriguing article, "The Gifted Student and His Enemies," Friedenberg says: "In the school, as in much of our society, creative youngsters seem usually to arouse a specific animus. Teachers dislike them, and the students learn quite early that the spontaneity and subjectivity they prize in themselves cannot be expected to lead to success in school or in later life."⁹ School teachers, especially those in public schools, recruited from middle class status (and Friedenberg characterizes them also as being of limited intellectual ability!) may well resent superior students who annoy and irritate by the novelty of their solutions of problems. They are not satisfied with the teacher's standard answer or with the answer in the "back of the book." They ingeniously try out new solutions, thereby creating resentment. Friedenberg reaches into the past for the Nietzschean concept of resentiment, a point of view recently utilized in Max Scheler's book by that title.¹⁰ Thus rebuffed, because of their novelty and originality, threatening to the middle-class teacher of "modest" ability, perhaps many of the high-ability students turn to underachievement as a protection against that bitter resentment which has become internalized and, indeed, institutionalized in some teachers. Perhaps the teacher cannot "play out" her desired role of indignation and resentment; therefore she develops inner hatred and bitterness which are readily perceived by the high-ability students. Whether or not one agrees with Friedenberg's theory, it is, indeed, an intriguing hypothesis to be explored through research studies; and it would be a very fruitful enterprise if teachers, at all levels, were to re-examine their own basic attitudes towards those who are superior to themselves, and thus to explore the possibility that they have "driven" superior students into underachievement.

9. Edgar Z. Friedenberg, COMMENTARY, May, 1962, Vol. 33, No. 5 pp. 410-419.
10. Max Scheler, RESENTIMENT, Lewis A. Coser (Ed.), Free Press of Glencoe, New York, 1961.

But there is a second intriguing hypothesis available for contemporary examination of the superior student and his underachievement. This second hypothesis is expounded in a recent article by Oscar Handlin, on the decline of scholarship at Harvard.¹¹ A recent study under the chairmanship of the present dean of the faculty of arts and sciences in Harvard¹² reveals that the ever-higher intellectual altitude of Harvard students is now a matter of record. We would suppose, therefore, that faculty members at Harvard would be "happy" in enjoying a high level of intellectual comradeship with individuals of high potential. Not so, because Oscar Handlin contends that these students have become "efficient grade-getters." One is reminded of the acid descriptive terms of an early day: "greasy grind,"¹³ the "gerund grinders,"¹⁴ and the European "philistine."¹⁵

These terms were used in an earlier century to describe the "serious" students who, like their professors, studied continuously and devoted little time to the "fun" diversions of campus life.

In sharp contrast, Handlin now observes that high-ability students at Harvard are very competent in memorizing answers to questions but they are unable to solve the questions and problems that have no answers but for which answers must be discovered:

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11. Oscar Handlin, "Are the Colleges Killing Education?" ATLANTIC, May 1962, Vol. 209, No. 5, pp. 41-45.
 12. ADMISSIONS TO HARVARD, A Report by the Special Committee on College Admissions Policy, Harvard University, February, 1960.
 13. John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, HIGHER EDUCATION IN TRANSITION, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1958, pp. 118, 125 and 134.
 14. Ibid., p. 159. See also Henry Seidel Canby, ALMA MATER, THE GOTHIC AGE OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE. Rinehart and Company, New York, 1936, p. 125.
 15. Richard Hofstadter and Walter P. Metzger, THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN THE UNITED STATES, Columbia University Press, New York, 1955, p. 317.

See also Henry D. Sheldon, STUDENT LIFE AND CUSTOMS, D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1901, p. xiii.

"I speak now not of the reconciled mass who somehow make their peace with the system, but of the ablest, among whom the qualities of excellence might be found. These young people secure an admirable training in the techniques of the correct answer. They learn to remember; to be accurate, neat, and cautious. But they are rarely called on to use their ability autonomously or speculatively, to deal with situations in which the answers are not known but must be discovered."¹⁶

The phenomenon of high-ability underachieving students, however it may be ultimately explained technically, is indeed a most tragic abuse of the Renaissance concept of the highest development of one's potentiality. These individuals, whether they be grade-getters or grade-ungetters, have failed to understand the real excitement of the collegiate experience. They have failed to learn the joys of learning, that learning is self-rewarding as well as vocationally fruitful. I am reminded of this concept of learning in the words of Sir James Jeans: ". . . For to many it is not knowledge, but the quest for knowledge, that gives the greater interest to thought - to travel hopefully is better than to arrive."¹⁷ Probably Cervantes had the same concept in mind when he said: "the road is better than the inn."

It seems to me that we counselors and all educators in high schools and colleges, indeed in all post-high school education, need to re-examine the art of learning and our relationship, to that learning. And we also need to re-examine our role as teachers in the cultivating of aspiration to learn to the limits of one's potentialities of all types. Indeed, we need to make of learning an immediately rewarding experience so that it will be reinforcing and so that individuals of all levels and types of abilities will desire to exploit their many rich opportunities to become their full potentialities.

16. Handlin, op. cit., p. 43.

17. James Jeans, PHYSICS AND PHILOSOPHY, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1943, p. 217.

We need, in other words, to reduce the number of tragic under-achieving individuals who go through life half enjoying and half trying, with limited satisfaction to themselves, and with a feeling of frustration and failure to both their parents and their teachers and counselors. This is, I believe, the major challenge of the future years in all types of education.

Il me semble que nous les conseillers, et tous les éducateurs des lycées et collèges, en fait les éducateurs de tous les établissements d'enseignement post-secondaire, nous avons besoin d'examiner à nouveau l'art d'apprendre et nos rapports avec cette action d'apprendre. Et nous avons aussi besoin de réexaminer notre rôle en tant que professeurs, enseignant dans le but de cultiver le désir d'apprendre jusqu'aux limites maximales des potentialités de tous ordres de chacun. En effet, nous devons faire de l'action d'apprendre une expérience qui porte des fruits immédiats, de telle sorte qu'elle soit un renforcement en elle-même et que des individus de tous niveaux et de toutes sortes d'aptitudes aient le désir d'exploiter les nombreuses occasions favorables qui se présentent à eux pour devenir ce qu'ils sont en puissance.

Nous avons besoin, en d'autres termes, de réduire le nombre des individus qui, tragiquement, se contentent de résultats au dessous de leurs possibilités, qui passent la moitié de leur vie à se distraire et l'autre moitié à expérimenter, n'obtenant qu'une satisfaction limitée pour eux-mêmes, et créant un sentiment intense de frustration et d'échec chez leurs parents de même que chez leurs professeurs et leurs conseillers. C'est là, je crois, le challenge le plus important des années à venir dans tous les genres d'enseignement.