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ABSTRACT

There are increasing numbers of nontraditional students with atypical learning problems, life styles, and ambitions appearing in the academic establishment, and the number is likely to grow during the next five years. Studies consistently confirm the success of treating the nontraditional student and thereby bringing about desired and desirable behavioral changes in individuals who were once thought to be unreasonably difficult, uneducable, incompetent, and even hopeless. The handicapped can be helped to lead rewarding and productive lives, the elderly can acquire new skills and find valuable outlets for these skills, and the mentally retarded may, in fact, according to recent research, be able to learn to read. In order to meet the needs of the new students, the following changes are likely to occur in education: concepts of instructional time and timing will change to accommodate more mini-courses, modular instruction, and short courses; the concept of learning space and facilities will change, especially to serve many students pursuing an external degree in off-campus situations; and management of human resources will become more adequate. (LL)

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THE NEW LEARNERS: FOCUS FOR THE FUTURE

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Accounts of the traditional students who encounter typical academic dif-
ficulties in our colleges are well represented in the professional literature.
We have identified these students' learning problems and have developed a kind
of stereotype, a rather comfortable composite; and the faster this comfort
fades, the more some of us grieve over it. But those of us whose business it
is to facilitate learning are compelled to take notice of the increasing num-
ber of non-traditional students with atypical learning problems, life styles,
and ambitions. (29:23) These students are the new learners, now considered
mavericks and misfits in the academic establishment. However, they are the
vanguard of population that promises to grow geometrically rather than in-
crementally during the next five years.

This paper will be concerned, first of all, with identifying some char-
acteristics of this growing population of learners, who are older, more prac-
tical, poorer, more disabled, and ethnically and linguistically more different --
altogether more complicated, interesting, and challenging individuals. Second,
this paper will discuss the reasons why this increase and qualitative mix is
inevitable, whether or not we welcome it. And finally this paper will indi-

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cate some of the changes -- or advances -- that will probably occur in terms of scheduling, staffing, facilities, materials, and learning strategies so that this student can be effectively accommodated. All of these changes are in an embryonic or infancy stage on many of our campuses now. (5:6-7)

CHARACTERISTICS

The new student will be older. The notion that the preponderance of our students are or will be youthful transfers from high school is diminishing. Last year college enrollment was up four percent; yet the number of students transferring directly from high school was down seventeen percent. (14:2-3) Returning women and mothers in their thirties and forties, now numbering 410,000 in higher education (21:34), partly account for this age differential. So do the adult males, who now have enough leisure to take classes in order to update skills needed for promotion or to prepare for a different occupation. Finally, we are now getting and can expect many more of the elderly, the senior citizens, who are disinclined to believe that "intelligence and memory decline in advanced adulthood except for a few outstanding people." (36:64) These persons as well as the researchers who are qualified to judge (6:99) are convinced that while the elderly may have lost their teeth, they have not lost their marbles. Thus, the concept of continuing, life-long education that is now a trend promises to become the mean. (34:47; 4:4)

The new student will be more practical and pragmatic in a number of ways. For instance, he will not be so BA degree oriented. Appropriately, the American Council on Education makes this statement: "The BA degree is the most over-used level for upgrading a vocation or profession. Frequently the degree has no functional relationship to the demands of the job." (27:3) The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education states, "The need, clearly, is for the prompt integration of our fractured system of education around the concept of career education. And the people know it." (23:3) Accordingly, this new student will be career-minded, witnessed by the fact that 66% of community college enrollees pursue occupational training. (1:1) Cooperative Career Education, in which 10% of California Community College students engage, will involve 25% of school populations within five years.(33) These students will also be consumer-minded students, who are alert to alternative methods of ingesting knowledge and training, as a result of their experience in business

and industry. They will be interested in job competencies rather than degrees, and so will their employers. (32:487) Whatever the virtues of a classical liberal arts education, these students will be demanding the kinds of skills they can apply immediately and concretely, not ultimately and philosophically. (28:48)

We will be dealing with a poorer student. Poverty in the academic establishment is big business. It's funded. Recruitment programs will continue to bring and sustain a student whose transportation problems occasion spotty attendance. He will be tardy in getting books and assignments and will have health problems affecting his learning. This student will be less able to cut red tape, read and complete the long and sometimes embarrassing qualifying forms, wait out the lines at the financial aids office, and, most of all, sustain the motivation necessary to develop basic academic skills. This student's attitude and life style may be viewed in capsule form in Annette Chamberlin's "Julian in Blunderland," (9) a portrait of a life style not easily infused with the survival skills necessary to achieve comparatively long-range educational goals and ill-suited to the scheduling of fifty-minute lectures punctually delivered three times weekly.

We will see more handicapped students, including the orthopedically handicapped, the deaf and hearing-impaired, the blind and partially sighted, speech-impaired, and the multi-handicapped. Estimates run that between six and twenty percent of our population can be so classified. (18) In California alone there are 48,000 of these people, only a fraction of whom are going to college. As the architectural barriers impeding the orthopedically handicapped are razed through enabling legislation and as more and more learning specialists are trained to effectively treat these and other handicapped in appropriate facilities, we can conservatively expect a 300 percent increase in the disabled student population on our campuses during the next five years. In response to the vocational education offerings of California community colleges, we can also expect to be working with another handicapped type, the mentally retarded, who comprises four percent of our population and who formerly was never expected to appear on a college campus. Regardless, the Office of the Chancellor, California Community Colleges, has plans on the drawing board to serve the mentally retarded, so we can expect the reality within five years. (25:2)

Principally because of the de facto moratorium on the deportation of an estimated 4,000,000 illegal aliens in this country, because of our more lenient interpretation of immigration laws, and because of our growing foreign student and foreign trade programs, we can expect more students wishing to master English as their second language in our college/adult programs. Ethnically these people are habituated to revere educational institutions; and, with an almost frightful eagerness, they will be seeking an effective means of achieving, first of all, linguistic survival skills, and then, the sharper skills necessary to engage in the college experience.

We also will continue to get more students from outreach and rehabilitation programs, especially programs designed to retrain the person who will need to engage in as many as six different jobs during his lifetime. (31:27) And finally, we can expect to cooperate more effectively with all sorts of governmental agencies, for instance, the prisons, from which we will be receiving students on rehabilitative probation leave.

All of these students, coming in greater and greater numbers -- the older, more practical, poorer, the disabled, the ethnically, linguistically and socially different -- are going to complement our enrollment and comprise a new pluralism. They are not going to be perfunctorily shunted into segregated dead-end programs on our campuses but are, inevitably, going to be integrated into the college/adult community because of certain enabling factors: continued and increasing financial support plus improved and more effective methods of treatment that assure success.

FACTORS ENABLING CHANGE

Only a few years ago, the word through the educational grapevine and in the professional literature was that seed and subsistence monies were drying up and that our "experiment" in educational socialism -- or democracy, if you prefer -- was over. But the contrary is true. If one governmental support program phases out, another takes its place; but most of them go on. For instance, the Vocational Education Act is alive and strong. The TEW, EOPS, Higher Education Acts, BOGS, Work-Study Programs, and (in California) Assembly Bill 1246, are steady. There is still a good deal of NDEA and NSF money around, not to mention private funding. Soft money is becoming firmer and firmer. Moreover, a legislature for whom we voted has decided that these

monies will be spent to enhance students' economic and social mobility. Therefore, appropriations will be appointed specifically for the kinds of programs serving the non-traditional student we have been discussing.

Although these programs will cost more (12:4), they will be less expensive than those we currently foster. Consider, for instance, that it costs \$6,400 for two years of college for the average person on the G.I. Bill. Compare that figure with the \$8,000 to \$10,000 per year needed to sustain a person on a public service job provided him after he was laid off. Economically it pays to educate the unemployed, and there is legislation on the drawing boards for a G.I. Bill for the unemployed. (15)

The second reason why this change is imminent is that studies consistently confirm our conviction that we can successfully treat the non-traditional student. Which is to say that we are becoming more successful at bringing about desired and desirable behavioral change in individuals who were once thought to be unreasonably difficult, uneducable, incompetent, and even hopeless. For instance, we have seen remarkable advances in the training of the handicapped, who no longer appear to be so "abnormal" and who can be helped to lead exceedingly rewarding and productive lives. Again, the 500 colleges that sponsor life-long learning programs report that the elderly can acquire new skills and find valuable outlets for these skills. (36) Finally, recent research indicates that our time-honored notion that the defined mentally retarded individual cannot learn to read is in serious question and may have been exploded. (10)

As funds are forthcoming and success is within our reach, it is we -- the learning facilitators, reading specialists, the "remedial" instructors, or whatever we are called -- who are destined to employ the funds and to initiate the programs, and, hopefully, to enjoy the success, which will probably come about as we effect the following changes.

THE CHANGES

Our concept of instructional time and timing will change substantially. We can improve on the quarter and semester system. We can expect more mini-courses, modular instruction of one week's duration, and short courses completed during a weekend period. (3:37-38) We can expect more single-concept or single skill courses, generating perhaps one quarter of a unit's credit. More students will contract to learn specific skills, and they will do this in self-paced, individualized, personalized instructional systems, in lab-

oratory situations open ninety hours a week. (8:xv) Time options like these will serve the non-traditional student who requires this kind of flexibility and intensity and immediate attention — indeed, he will demand it. Just as stores, markets, a multitude of services, and now even some banks have expanded their services and adjusted their hours and offerings, so will we. Consequently, students who drop in and drop out at irregular intervals to learn at their own discretion will be considered respectable, not instances of recidivism.

Our concept of learning space and facilities will change, especially to serve many students pursuing an external degree in off-campus situations. (11:48) Therefore our edifice complex will be resolved and instructional space will be demonopolized. For instance, learning at home or in other non-campus facilities via the various media including open-circuit and cable TV will become more prevalent, and students may choose to encounter instructors only when ready to prove competencies. (35:14) And this tele-training will prove itself to be effective, research indicating that the failure of educational technology until now is chiefly attributable to faculty resistance and some unsound production practices. (27:9-11) Finally, expanded, off-campus, decentralized learning is inevitable when we consider the challenge of the energy and ecological crisis as well as eco-spasms. Consider, for instance, the amount of energy expended, the environment polluted, and the budgets depleted as thirty-five students journey to and from the campus classroom.

Our use of the media will become more enlightened. Having forgiven ourselves and our colleagues for some of the mindless abuses of the media, we will make technology work better for us as problem-solving expedients. For instance, we might as well realize that the computer has tenure on our campuses. It can, especially in larger colleges, be the most humanizing single technological investment we can make. (2) It can collect, store, retrieve, compute, compare, compose, collate, and translate critical and necessary student data that would otherwise be forgotten, become lost in the files, or be too bothersome to retrieve. Also the potential of the videocassette, for both individual and group viewing, has barely been tapped. What better way, for example, to teach listening-notemaking skills? Nor have we yet to see the golden age of what has been called the "humble media" (17:21-23) — cassette players and recorders, 8mm films, 35mm slides, filmstrips, single-concept

films -- which are waiting for better, more relevant, more sensibly packaged, professionally produced software to fill the materials gap. (22) And such void will be filled as we progress from our parochial posture to one of cooperation, and as we engage in a selfless and trusting consortium of instructors, producers, publishers, and actors, utilizing professional recording equipment, modern production facilities, and a system of instructional refinement sensitive to field-testing input so that students will have the accountable alternatives that they deserve.

Our management of human resources will become more adequate. Having been liberated by the properly prescribed media, learning specialists, as we fancied our roles years ago, will be spending their time trouble-shooting non-routine learning problems instead of lecturing so much -- what Mager calls the "spray and pray method." And perhaps fewer of us will engage in one of the shallow alternatives to the lecture method, the habit of emceeding classes that purport to develop skills. (30:23) Moreover, we will learn to better manage our time and the time as well as the methods employed by tutors, technicians, and other paraprofessionals to effect humane, cost-effective, individualized learning, because that's what our business is all about. (20:65; 22; 16:44-47) We will, then, retrain ourselves and others to respond to the demands of the new student. (26:86-87)

THE OUTCOME

It is we, the learning facilitators, more than those in other persuasions or disciplines, who are best equipped intellectually and emotionally to initiate the innovative programs that will serve the new learners. This responsibility, left to others less able, is liable to devolve into a rigid curricular framework that refuses to self-destruct (19) and encourages students to abide by the first law of academic demography: "If you let students go elsewhere, they will." (24:7) We can best accomplish this revolution by developing a new synergism (13:28), a blending of human resources -- ourselves, tutors, technicians, counselors, the learners themselves -- and the media in all its forms, so that the unified effect will be much greater than the sum of the individual parts. The demands on us will be much greater than those exacted on others in our colleges because our purpose involves growth, not maintenance. The challenges will not be met by those who merely lucidly analyze the situation, but by those who can change it.

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