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ABSTRACT

Several institutions, including churches, community groups, and political organizations, lay claim to the task of bolstering existing values and restructuring the ethical set of the nation. The higher education community has an equally legitimate claim for the responsibility of inculcating values. The role of education in values transference is not new, and each time society experiences a moral malaise, discussion begins anew. Throughout the 1980's, educational writers have stressed that a carefully selected curriculum not only teaches about intellectual values, but also nurtures them. Instructors dealing with ethical issues in their disciplines have been urged to discuss the art of commitment in a pluralistic and uncertain context. Toleration for ability and willingness to act decisively when faced with uncertainty have been represented as a type of civic literacy. With values, ethics, and a moral point of view considered essential to quality of life, colleges were perceived as having potential civic functions which no other single institution can provide. Writers supported the contention that the development of civic literacy is a legitimate role for America's higher education community. Colleges were urged to forget their institutional egos and become involved in social needs and concerns, and students voiced concern with the consequences of unethical behavior and the effect of organizational structures and leadership on the prevention of misconduct. Though many community colleges have long been involved in programs and projects designed to improve the economic and social quality of life in their communities, few complete models exist for fostering civic literacy. One example, at Hagerstown Junior College, in Maryland, uses a colloquium approach to analyze such diverse topics as social change, leadership, and the new corporate system. In fall 1988, over 100 faculty, students, administrators, and community members met to discuss the state of ethics in the professions. (JMC)

COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND CIVIC LITERACY: THE QUEST FOR VALUES, ETHICS, AND COLLEGE RENEWAL

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Introduction

In the social satire **Alice in Wonderland**, Lewis Carroll's Dutchess states, "Everything's got a moral if only you can find it."[1] The 1980's seem to be plagued with problems resulting from the lost moral. Politicians, military heroes, evangelists, and sports figures profess to search while allowing their behavior to be directed by situational if not sociopathic motives. As a result, ethics in America are comparable with the eras of Warren Harding and U. S. Grant. What social institutions are available to bolster existing values and restructure the ethical set of our nation?

There are several institutions that lay claim to the task. Churches, the religious institution, present the case for a moral resurgence. Community groups, from the political institution, advance a new ethic of service. Each case is cogent; however, the educational institution has an equally legitimate claim. Manfred Stanley, professor of sociology at Syracuse University, suggests that colleges and universities are civic institutions "defined by a large majority of citizens as vital to . . . the moral prosperity of the commonwealth."[2] His point of view is mirrored in a re-emergence of concern over education's responsibility for inculcating values. A review of several current applications is germane.

Education and Values: A Renewed Dialogue

The role of education in values transference is not new. Early leaders in the field of higher education—John Dewey, James B. Conant, Robert M. Hutchins—explored various facets of the issue. When our

society experiences a moral malaise, discussion begins anew. The 1980's are a particularly valid example. The Reagan era has been characterized as a period reflecting little concern for universal values or ethical principles. Rather, emphasis seems to be focused on individual gain with little regard for moral standards. Educators identified the problem early, agreed that the higher education curriculum should examine ethical, moral, and values-related issues but could not agree on either the goals for or the methods of values-oriented education. Some proponents did advance precise positions.

Edward Langerak, professor of philosophy at St. Olaf's College (MN), was persuasive. "A carefully selected curriculum not only teaches about . . . intellectual values, it also nurtures them, presenting them in a way that increases the tendencies of students to appreciate them and act on them."[3] He points out that the "values clarification" movement focuses on consciousness raising. Attention is given to personal values, others' values, and the interaction among them that is reflected in social issues and institutional interactions. The issue of helping students find answers to life's ever-present questions, while important, is not the primary goal. Rather, emphasis needs to be given to a type of civic literacy--toleration for ambiguity and the fostering of a willingness to act decisively, even gracefully, when faced with uncertainty. Langerak's conclusion is cogent. ". . . instructors who attend explicitly to ethics or values issues in their disciplines should also be prepared to discuss the art of commitment in a pluralistic and uncertain context."[4] This position

presents one of the earliest cases in the decade for civic literacy and commitment.

The question of developing civic literacy through education continued to emerge throughout the first half of the decade. In their bestseller, **Corporate Cultures**, Deal and Kennedy are explicit regarding the dimensions of the challenge. "We think that society today suffers from a pervasive uncertainty about values, a relativism that undermines leadership and commitment alike."[5] They suggest that while ultimate right and wrong in the abstract are philosophical issues lacking pragmatic application, the corporate world needs greater concreteness. "Particular values clearly make sense for specific organizations operating in specific economic circumstances. Perhaps because ultimate values seem so elusive, people respond positively to practical ones. Choices must be made, and values are an indispensible guide in making them."[6] The focus of their work is the culture underlying selected successful businesses. The common theme is found in their concluding statement, "When times are tough, these companies can reach deeply into their shared values and beliefs for the truth and courage to see them through. When new challenges arise, they can adjust."[7] Throughout their research, emphasis is given to the role of education within the college and the corporate environment in fostering a values orientation. They reinforce the importance of focusing some attention on what has been called "the common good."

Does the concept of "commonweal" have practical utility or is it simply an axiological construct? Stanley is concise. "One need not be unduly complex about what [the common good] means. . . . The public

good is what we as citizens feel we have in common: our rights, our concern for our potential vulnerability as victims of injustice, our collective civic aspirations. . . ."[8] These issues have become increasingly central as the 1980's progressed. Numerous bestsellers emerged which focused upon aspects of enhancing the common good. Increasing attention was given to the arena of business and industry as the setting in which the conflict would be joined.

Values, Ethics, and the Common Good in the Civic Arena

Among the many authors wrestling with the processes of enhancing values transference, Robert Theobold presents an interesting series of insights. He uses the concept of "social entrepreneurship" as an analytical paradigm. "social entrepreneurs . . . help people discover new ways of creating a high quality of life."[9] Underlying his definition is the understanding that values, ethics, and a moral point of view for all are essential to quality of life.

Theobald's first premise is that people must possess a vision of the future which challenges all to be active and creative. "When people see they can bring about change, they can be challenged to accept broader goals."[10] His description of the vision is consistent with the concept of commonweal. "The first step is for each of us to decide that we have a personal responsibility for the society in which we live. The second is to accept that there are no pat answers, but that each of us must struggle to apply the values of faith, honesty, responsibility, humility, and love to real-life situations without

prejudgment."[11] His values are consistent with Stanley's concept of civic literacy.

Theobald suggests that self-regulation is essential to the development of a society characterized by a high quality of life. "A great deal of the over-regulation in our societies could be eliminated if groups were prepared to discipline their own members. . . . Courts and outside discipling boards have been relied upon because peers have been unwilling to face [this] unpleasant reality."[12] One goal of Langerak's "values-driven" curriculum is to enhance the ability and willingness of individuals to act decisively from an ethical perspective.

How does Theobald propose that his social entrepreneurship be realized? His answer, while vague, does highlight a potential response for higher education. "The lack of clear-cut criteria for effective action in today's conditions makes people profoundly nervous about their choices. Still, we can help overcome this difficulty by encouraging experimentation and spreading information about successful models."[13] Experimentation, model development, and dissemination have traditionally been the responsibility of America's higher education institutions. Stanley suggests "The university is not a collegiate tower but a worldly institution. . . . [it] has potential civic educational functions which no other single institution can provide."[14]

Civic Literacy: Education's Responsibility

Does America's higher education community consider the development of values, ethics, morals--the fostering of civic literacy--a

legitimate role to be played? There are empirical indicators that suggest a positive response. The spring 1989 issue of **Educational Record**, the magazine of higher education, is devoted to a special focus: moral leadership. Several authors are quite specific. Alexander Astin, director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, presents an interesting perspective.

> The basic point to be made . . . is a rather simple one: When an institution exists primarily for its own sake, and when it identifies itself primarily in terms of its resources and reputation, its capacity to serve as an instrument for improving society is compromised. In short, the biggest obstacle to higher education's serving as a major instrument for societal improvement is the institutional ego. In a sense, our colleges and universities need to learn how to transcend their institutional egos and to become more actively involved in what is going on in the society.[15]

While Astin is precise, he makes no mention of students. What is their position? Do they merely seek credentialing, or is civic literacy relevant? Thomas Piper, senior associate dean for education programs at the Harvard Business School, provides clarification.

> Our experience has been that the students want to talk about these issues. They want to talk about the systemic consequences of unethical behavior; they want to understand how an organization, through its systems and structure and leadership, can ensure misconduct will not occur; they want to join in community outreach. In most schools, students are hopeful that we, as teachers and administrators, will encourage and lead the discussions of issues fundamental to the turning out of professionally trained and morally and socially responsible men and women.[16]

Civic literacy is, from this perspective, both a responsibility for the institution and a right of the student.

How will this process be integrated? Judith Eaton, immediate past chair of the American Council on Education and former president of the Community College of Philadelphia, presents an interesting perspective.

In discussing minority access, she synthesizes the broader case for developing civic literacy. "My commitment had to reflect a philosophy of change, a dedication to social justice, a vision of the society we might be. This effort would take a long time. It would be frustrating, difficult, and frequently discouraging. The need is unquestionable. . . . If not us, who?"[17] The assessment has come full circle. Eaton's statement synthesizes the disparate elements suggested by Stanley, Langerak, and Theobald. The case for civic literacy has been made. Is there a practical model that can be applied?

Civic Literacy: A Community College Response

Terry O'Banion, executive director of the League for Innovation in the Community College, edited a collection of essays which analyzes and documents the major innovations in community colleges in the late 1980's. Many of them identify strategies relevant to the fostering of civic literacy. Long suggests that the college as community development agent must plan and implement projects and programs to improve the economic and social qualities of life in the community or geographic area served.[18] Deegan reinforces Theobold's entrepreneural spirit. "The concept of creating and rewarding entrepreneural projects within colleges is a good one . . . [that has] a significant impact. . . . This path of emphasizing and rewarding a more entrepreneural spirit . . . [will] improve quality . . . in the decade ahead."[19] Finally, the interactive nature of civic literacy is highlighted by Armes when she states: "The seeds of renewal and innovation seem to bear most fruit through collaboration." Her goal is to exert " . . .

still more effort in breaking down artificial barriers and impediments to progress."[20] Is it possible to suggest a strategy? For the past decade Hagerstown Junior College has been using a colloquium approach to implement civic literacy. In 1979 the New York Philosophical Society funded the college to conduct its first ethics colloquium. In following years, faculty, students, administrators, and community residents have analyzed such diverse topics as social change, leadership, and the new corporate system. In the fall of 1988 over 100 citizens from each group mentioned above met to assess the state of ethics in the professions. The resulting publication extended the results of the colloquium to hundreds more. Professor Tom L. Beauchamp of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University, said of the effort, "The program at [HJC] is a wholly worthwhile attempt to engage these joint problems by training students in professional ethics prior to their entry into the professions."[21] If a college wishes to assist its community in developing civic literacy, the colloquium process is effective. A sense of commitment, participation, and direction will emerge. Stanley presents a useful summary. "The [college] articulates moral order. [It] is expected to mediate and reconcile [diverse] conceptions . . . , at least to baptize some of them with the holy water of certification."[22] The result, over time, will be the emergence of the high quality of life proposed by Theobald. The population will be literate civically and if, as Carroll's Queen proposes, "it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place [and] if you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!," they will be prepared for the long run.

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