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The Ethics of Partnership A Paradigm for Interaction between Students and Residence Hall Staff

BY RICHARD SEARER

It has been stated by Mueller (1961) that one of the goals of higher education is to preserve, transmit, and enrich the culture. The second goal she lists is the development of all aspects of personality. It is a basic contention of this author that the goal of preserving and transmitting, though not enriching, the culture stands in dynamic tension with the second goal of higher education enumerated by Mueller, that of student development. Our present technological society (Ellul, 1964) encourages the depersonalization of individuals as well as organizations for the sake of purported technological goals. Therefore, if those associated with higher education, particularly those of us working in the residence halls, choose to pursue the goal of student development, we must recognize that we are confronting a powerful societal trend.

If the goal of student development is to be effectively actualized in the residence hall environment, then authentic relationships between students and staff members must be effected. DeCoster and Mable (1974) suggest that

Authority and power must be distributed authentically, not paternalistically, and the judgment of students must be valued, desired and utilized (p. 35).

Such power sharing is imperative if students, who are most effected by

decisions, are to have any effective voice in the decision-making process.

I believe that a new model for student-staff relations must be implemented before a redistribution of power congruent with humanistic values can take place. Students and residence hall staff members must recognize each other as partners in the process of residence education. I would like to evaluate the educational philosophy of Paulo Friere (1970) as an ethical paradigm for realignment of student-staff relations.

According to Friere's philosophy of education, both "teacher" and "student" are subjects striving through communication to critically perceive the way in which they exist in their environment. Friere declares that it is the humanistic task of the oppressed to liberate both themselves and their oppressors. He envisions the existence of two stages of liberation: the unveiling of the world of oppression by the oppressed with subsequent transformation, and the ensuing liberation of all mankind. In short, the pedagogy of the oppressed eventually presents itself as the pedagogy of all persons.

Friere reluctantly admits that the oppressed require outside aid in order to begin, and maintain, the process of liberation. This admission carries significant implications for residence hall staff. It is my contention that this problem-solving method of education constitutes the proper way to enable students, as subjects, to understand and fashion

the reality which confronts them. However, it is necessary, indeed imperative, that residence hall staff aid these students in orienting themselves to their environment. We who possess some power within the institution must act as partners with students in order to provide a legitimate power base in the struggle to implement the goal of student development.

This "ethic of partnership" is a relationship of mutuality in which the respective partners, staff members and students, depend on each other for the development of their respective strengths. Not only can we as residence hall staff help students orient themselves to their environment and facilitate the achievement of their developmental tasks, but students, through our interactions with them, can help us fulfill our professional and personal needs. In order to provide a model for the implementation of this ethic of partnership within the residence halls environment, I will rely on the paradigm for partnership developed by Carl Rogers (1972). Rogers states:

In moments of bemused thinking, I wonder if it would truly be too much to ask of our educational system that it include one new goal, in addition to those they have defined so intellectually, so precisely. I wonder if they would be willing not only to believe, but to prove by their actions that one goal of education is to assist the young person to live as a person with other persons (p. 215).

In accordance with this goal, Rogers defines four "threads" of partnership relationships: dedication and commitment, communication, the dissolution of roles, and becoming a separate self (pp. 199-206).

DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT

In order to successfully implement the primary goal of residence

education, that of student development within the residence hall environment, both students and staff members must commit themselves to the process of their relationship. Student development is not a goal which can be magically achieved: the components of this concept are accomplished because the relationship between staff and students is mutually and personally satisfying. Both parties grow from the interaction and, therefore, are willing to commit themselves to the relationship. Within the residence hall environment, students can work on the developmental tasks with which they are confronted (Coons, 1971; Erikson, 1964). In his essay, "The Golden Rule in the Light of New Insight," Erikson emphasizes that not only adolescents, but all humans face developmental tasks appropriate to age, life stage, and personal condition (p. 233). Therefore, it is important to note that a partnership relationship fulfills the needs of both staff and student. Cognizance of this reality deters the development of paternalistic attitudes by staff members. Both partners gain from the interaction; therefore, both partners must be open to the potentialities of the other. No longer can staff members presume that they know what is best for students; such decisions must be worked out in the process of the relationship.

COMMUNICATION

The need for open and honest communication between staff members and students in a residence hall community represents an obvious component of a partnership relationship. John Dewey (1916), in his book *Democracy and Education* recognized the relationship between communication and community.

There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Nevertheless, is that our relationships as live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the

male attempting to enhance any individual growth and hopefully discover even greater depths of who I am as a person. My interactions with students constitute a major focus for achieving these objectives. How can we expect students to openly communicate with us if we do not expose ourselves to them? Paternalistic expectations of student openness without a concomitant openness on the part of staff members is ethically indefensible as well as dysfunctional. Students, as all human beings, are quite sophisticated at identifying staff members whose commitment to them is not genuine and complete.

BECOMING A SEPARATE SELF

This component of partnership relationships might appear to be paradoxical, yet it assumes central importance. The process of any relationship, including those between students and residence hall staff members, is enriched in proportion to the personal involvement that each partner contributes to the relationship. Therefore, as each partner grows in relation to their developmental tasks, each has more to offer to the relationship. Without the solidification of a self-accepted personal identity, the partnership relationship is severely threatened. If staff members have not developed a positive and cohesive self-image, they will be limited in what they can offer in student relationships. If a young adult, for example, is failing at the developmental task central to their stage of development, the quest for identity (Erikson, 1968), then the relationship may be ripe for paternalistic imposition of values. Like all other components of the ethics of partnership, this component is the responsibility of both partners who enter a relationship.

CONCLUSION

Why delineate an abstract ethical paradigm for the relationship between

residence hall staff members and students? The answer to this question can be briefly enumerated:

1) In ways both subtle and overt, students are crying out to be heard; students want someone within institutions of higher education to find out who they are as persons. Too often, professors refuse to relate to anything beyond the cognitive development of students. Students desire and deserve more. If only by default, residence hall staff members must assume responsibility for developmental concerns and to do so requires a philosophical justification.

2) As alluded to previously, depersonalization is a pervasive element in our technological society. Individuals are often identified by their role and students are being "machine-tooled" to fit this society. Unfortunately, institutions of higher education are not exempt from this debilitating trend. Residence hall staff concerned about the goal of student development must not be co-opted by this powerful societal trend. Though not addressed explicitly, the battle against depersonalization must be considered a facet of this goal. It is, therefore, imperative that the ethics of partnership be adopted as a paradigm for relationships lest we too rely heavily upon role formulations to determine the nature of interactions.

3) In conversations with my residence hall colleagues, it is obvious that, although we relate with students as persons, we do not devote enough thought to the philosophical justification for this relationship orientation. The ethics of partnership applied to staff interactions with students provides a basis for growth for both partners. For educators committed to the goal of student development, the adoption of such an ethic provides a viable vehicle for authentic moral change.

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The Future of the Women's Liberal Arts College

BY JANET CROWIE

A discussion of women's liberal arts institutions best begins with an historical analysis. The early movement for women's education arose from the spirit of reform and humanitarianism in the first half of the nineteenth century. The fundamental democratic ideals of the inherent rights of the individual and human personality, combined with the demand for an equal position to that of men, gave the impetus to women's higher education. Mary Wollstonecraft, a leading feminist, proclaimed that natural ability was not inherently unequal between men and women. This attitude was due to socialization by the existing environment. (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968, p. 66)

The rise of the female college was an extension of the seminary movement established in 1821 by Emma Willard, and by C. Beecher, and 1836 by Mary Lyon. Although female "academies" served as an impetus, a new model was needed as the instruction in these institutions was geared towards helping the woman find "her place in society." (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968, p. 67)

Education for women in the 18th century concerned itself with household duties and the "finishing school" ideal. With the establishment of the first women's college, this emphasis is to change to intellectualism, mental discipline, and preparation for professions. The model assumed by early women's institutions was closely aligned with the pattern provided by the existing male colleges. Liberal arts colleges were established in order to prove that women were capable of the same intellectual activities as men. These early schools

in the North are the familiarly referred to as "Seven Sisters." In the South, less emphasis was placed on academics and more on cultivating a cultural Southern womanhood. Even in these institutions, however, the curriculum base paralleled that of the traditional male liberal arts institution. As a result of overcompensation and the attempt to prove these students as intellectually competent, many of the more prominent women's schools established standards of higher academic excellence than their male counterparts. (Jencks and Riesman, 1969, p. 102)

Although the battle was won for the right of women to be educated, both in separate institutions and through the rise of co-education, problems and resistance were strong. The failure of co-education and women's institutions prior to 1860 was the result of the importance of the classical curriculum and an unwillingness to make changes within traditional male oriented institutions. Fears were rampant that the right of women for higher education would result in a loss of credibility and removal of prestige. Education at this period of time was not democratically oriented but an elite privilege. The social intellectual climate proved a definite barrier to the initial progress of the female movement.

Another basic problem confronting the early female colleges was the inadequate secondary education available to women. This resulted, at the outset, in low standards of achievement. The ability to pay was one of the most important credentials for enrollment as endowments were low.