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The Experimental College:

Its heritage, Its future

Remarks by:

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Evergreen State College
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INTRODUCTION

I am delighted to join you at this special celebration. I well recall, traveling to Olympia, years ago to work intensely for several days in a motel conference room planning a new institution called Evergreen State College. Those were leading days in higher education and we were planning a new college committed to excellence and innovation. Returning ten years later, it is reassuring to see how that dream has been sustained.

My own introduction to the experimental college goes back to the late 1950s when I was asked to participate in a conference at Goddard College.

On that occasion I was introduced to that remarkable college president, Tim Pitkin, a brilliant, persuasive advocate for the somewhat revolutionary, certainly untraditional, position that the student is at the center of the education process.

I found enormously appealing and intellectually stimulating Tim's questions to educators:

- o Instead of defending what was always done that way, he asked, "What are we doing? Why are we requiring this course? Why don't we try it this new challenging way?"

-2-

What Tim at Goddard and his colleagues at Reed and Antioch, Black Mountain and Wayne State, and the other experimental institutions wanted was not change for the sake of change. They wanted change for the sake of students.

My views of the education and the learning processes were shaped dramatically by Tim Pitkin and that hearty team of brash and irreverent "experimentalists" inspired by Ralph Tyler who bonded together to form the Union of Experimenting Colleges.

- o While at Upland College, Ralph Tyler encouraged me to introduce the 4-1-4 calendar and a grant from The Ford Foundation put frosting on the cake.
- o It was the influence of Tim Pitkin that I urged the Trustees of the State University of New York to start Empire State College, establish a new rank, Distinguished Teaching Professor and give awards for excellence in teaching.
- o And it was Ralph Tyler's inspiration that moved me to establish the Horace Mann Learning Center in The Office of Education.
- o One of my greatest disappointments and deepest frustrations as Chancellor in New York came when I tried to create the College of Bedord Hills within the New York State prison system.

- o My plan was approved by the Governor and the State University Trustees.
- o But the Legislature refused to provide the funds for it. That was the Legislature's response to the violence at Attica.
- o My response was that a college behind bars would have helped us get away from the very conditions which created Attica: the warehouse of people without hope, the treadmill of despair.
- o So you might expect that I was highly pleased by the remarks last spring of Chief Justice Warren Burger. He spoke of our failure as a society to provide education to prisoners as a step toward rehabilitating them as giving members rather than as preying criminals.
- o I would like to think now that it would be possible to have a prison behind bars.

Perhaps we can move to an acceptance of Tim Pitkin's ever-true message that college is not a place--it is a process.

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The profound and penetrating questions that Tim Pitkin asked twenty-years ago began to receive answers not in the classrooms, but on the barricades.

- o New slogans blew in the wind across our campus in the 1960s.
- o The Beattles replaced the Kinston Trio and the free speech movement drew the attention in Time Magazine, from Huntly and Brinkly, from governors, state legislators and those in higher education.

Students who only a few years earlier had dutifully read college catalogues as sacred writ suddenly announced. "Do not fold, spindle or mutilate."

We winded at the five letter words that came over the loudspeakers in the quadrangles and on the campus lawns. But there was no denying that students would no longer be ignored.

Another powerful kind of change swept across our land. The U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision struck down dual school systems on racial lines. College students joined the civil rights crusade. They spent summers in Jackson, Mississippi. They marched in Americus, Georgia, and Selma, Alabama. Those students were different people when they returned to campus. They had marched for the rights of blacks, and they became impatient with academic games.

-5-

So it was that the education reform movement became a student movement, helped along by sympathetic college and university leaders. The yeast for growth was fermenting on the campuses as students claimed individual rights and struggled against a system that too often proved rigid and irresponsible.

Then came Vietnam--casting its long shadow across the campuses. Students spoke urgently about the immortality before the rest of the nation saw the darkness of that tragedy. The educational movement that had demanded free speech, a free campus press, changes in curriculum, on-campus lifestyle, and a respect for the student as individual provided fertile ground for in this anti-war confrontation.

These frustrations soon yielded to an even darker impulse--the development of a broad-based counter-culture whose disciples too often took their solace in LSD and vented their rejection of the system through bombings and assaults upon the establishment. It was a time when dropping out and denouncing everyone over 30 were the fashion.

Today all of this sounds like ancient history--but it was the context in which Evergreen State was born.

And while the radicalism of the 1960s stands in shocking contrast to the button down "me-first" mentality of today the influences of the Revolution lingers on. We need look no further than David Stockman's haircut.

II

Looking at today's college catalogues also tells a dramatic story.

- o When most of us first read college catalogues we encountered rigid requirements and a cookie cutter education.
- o Goddard College's independent study and Antioch's off-campus program were the exceptions--not the rule.
- o Today all this was changed. Recently I looked at the catalogue of Kent State University. At that rather traditional, mid America institution, the following choices are listed:

- Credit by Examination
- Pass/Fail Grading
- Grades other than A to F,

including AV, INC, IP, NA, NQR, R, S, U, W, Y. and Z.

- "Forgiveness Policies" on Probation
- Individualized Majors
- Off-Campus Study
- Non-Degree Programs
- Cross Disciplinary Majors
- Weekend and Evening Colleges

- Interdisciplinary Certificate Programs
- Combined Baccalaureate and Masters Program
- Institutes and Centers

o At Manhattanville College, once a traditional, Catholic women's college, the catalogue promises these options:

- Six or Seven Semester Plans
- Cooperative Programs in medicine, law, science, and business administration.
- Off-campus study, including overseas
- A Study Skills Center
- Credit for "Life Experience"
- Programs for Older Adults

The point I wish to make is this: The reformers and experimentalists in higher education should declare victory.

o Virtually every university and college in this country today offers choices to the student and places demands on the institution that were regarded only a generation ago as within the exclusive province of the experimental school.

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The movers and shakers of experimentation in the 1950s have seen come to pass these visions:

o There is a new understanding of who should be educated, a new definition of the student.

- o We have defined more broadly the content of education.
- o We have a more realistic view of the location of education. Rigid rules that made the campuses the beginning and end of education have been replaced by a consensus that human beings can study and read and learn--can be educated--almost everywhere.
- o Finally, the legacy of the experimental colleges and universities includes a new definition of the length of education. We have come to accept the reality that learning never ends.

III

When we explore this legacy up closely, we discover, not surprisingly, that the agenda for the past is also the mandate for the future. The issues addressed by the experimental schools in the 1950s are enduring. The context, however, has taken a dramatic change and the enduring questions must be examined in the context of what Mrs. Thatcher described as the dangerous decade of the 1980s.

In just ten years, we have gone from a baby boom to a baby bust.

- o The youth cohort will drop by more than 25 percent.
- o And schools and colleges will go through the struggles of retrenchment.

But the real student story is not the overall decline, but what's going on just below the surface.

In the United States today

- o 28 percent of all White Americans (Caucasians) are 18 years of age and under,
- o 37 percent of all Blacks are in that group,
- o and 42 percent of all Hispanics are 18 years of age and under.

Today--America is the fourth largest Spanish speaking nation in the world.

There is another important fact we must examine.

- o 75 percent of white youths (aged 18 and 19) graduated from high school,
- o 57 percent of black youths (18-19) graduated,
- o while only 54 percent of Hispanics in this age group are high school graduates.

Consider also that for the population as a whole,

- o only 17 percent of the Hispanics adults have attended college.
- o For Blacks the rate is 20 percent.
- o While 32 percent of adult Whites have gone to college.

The point I make is this:

- o The face of young America is changing.
- o And the new students are precisely those who have been least well served by the nation's colleges and schools.

-11-

Consider that the size of the college-age population, the most important factor affecting future college enrollment, will shortly begin to decline, according to projections of the Census Bureau. Between 1980 and 1990 the decrease will be about 18 percent with most of the drop--11 percent--during the first half of the decade. By 1985, there will be 1.7 million fewer 18-21 year olds than in 1980.

-12-

IV

Second, we must continue to confront the content of education.

As we hurtle into the future, the technological complexity of which we can only suspect, we cannot forget the commonality of our enterprise. For while we send a space shuttle to a Skylab and stretch for footsteps on the planets, we must not overlook the universality of mankind on earth.

Though our eyes may be on the stars, our ability to proceed rests upon an acceptance of basic values that find their expression through the gifts of an educated society. Our quest for a common learning is seen in the renewal of general education in the United States, a movement to which the experimental colleges and universities have made valuable contributions.

If students are to understand themselves, their society, and the world in which they live, they must explore six broad subject areas that are the proper concern of general education.

- o A shared use of symbols, including language, music, dance and the visual arts. Students urgently need "tube literacy." After all, in the United States, children watch 6,000 hours of television before they spend a single hour in the classroom. Students need help to see how visual and auditory signals reinforce each other, how ideas can be distorted, how thoughts and

feelings can be subliminally conveyed, and how the accuracy and reliability of messages can be tested.

- o The second item on the common learning agenda is an understanding of shared membership in groups and institutions. The goal should be to help students see that everyone shares membership in the "common institutions" of our culture: those social structures that shape our lives, impose obligations, restrict choices, and provide services that we could not obtain in isolation.
- o A general education should explore the significance of work in the lives of individuals and examines how work patterns reflect the values and shape the social climate of a culture. Such a curriculum would ask: What have been the historical, philosophical, religious, and social attitudes toward work around the world? How are notions about work related to social status and human dignity? What determines the different status and rewards we grant to different forms of work? Why is some work highly rewarded and other work relatively unrewarded?

- o Through a general education, students should come to understand science, not just the facts, but also the methodologies. All students should come to understand how science is a process of trial and error; how, through observation and testing, theories are found, refined, sometimes discarded and often give rise to other theories.
- o Students should study, as well, our common heritage. They need more than a collection of facts. More essential is an approach that would emphasize the convergence of social, religious, political, economic, and intellectual forces.
- o The capstone of common learning should be a study of the personal and social significance of shared values. That would include an understanding of the laws, customs and traditions that reflect widely shared beliefs, and an identification by students of the premises in their own beliefs. Students need to learn how to make responsible decisions and to participate in reaching through the moral and ethical dilemmas which confront all of us.

-15-

V

Third, the reforms of the future must put in contemporary context the persistent question: Where should students learn?

- o Twenty-five years ago the big debate was off-campus education.

Formal education is, in fact, no longer confined to lecture hall, laboratory and library. It is in the dashboard of your car, by your bed, in your Japanese-made miniature TV set, in your home computer.

The experimental colleges and universities, more than the traditional schools, should be able to fashion curricula, methodologies, schedules and personnel to marry technology and the hunger of the human mind.

This same technology, you on today's campuses know, has revolutionized methods of instruction.

- o Punch in the right numbers and letters and a list of the current literature on a given topic will scroll across the screen.
- o Finish your morning job by 6:30, learn Arabic in your living room while eating your granola.
- o Sit in a learning center in Cleveland and talk with a memory bank in Minneapolis over a shielded telephone line. You two are soon on a first name basis. Make a mistake using the verb "to crash" and two airplanes will collide in mid-air, fall to earth, and the screen will warn you about the consequences of grammatical error.

-16-

- o Plug in a video disc and watch a talking head on the development of Western civilization.
- Snap in a cassette and listen to conversational Swahili.

We must become master, rather than slave, of technology. We have already glimpsed the darker side, the victory of the cathode tube over the printed word in the death of proud, independent American newspapers, journals that brought a stimulative competition to the marketplace of news gathering, journals that offered unique insights into our communities.

We mourn the passing of newspapers because they had^{ve} a personality, and they meant something special to us. They were daily companions who offered ideas to comfort, shock, amuse, challenge, enlighten, distract us.

Increasingly, as a people, we relinquish diversity to the Nielsen rating. As the world demands more of our attention, as emerging people confront us with demands only yesterday left unheard, we get our news and opinions in tight little packages that offer simplicity. Some of the most effective critics of television have been Walter Cronkite, Tom Brokaw, John Chancellor, Frank Reynolds, Ted Koppel--professionals often frustrated by the clock, technology and ratings game.

VI

Finally, we must continue to examine the length of education.

- ° With your help, we have come to accept the proposition that "learning never ends".
- ° Ishmael, in Moby Dick, says of himself: "I have an everlasting itch for things remote." Our institutions must deal with the lifelong learning of those who would "scratch the everlasting itch".
- ° Lifelong learning is not just an easing of discomfort about the unknown. It is a matter of urgency and survival.
- ° Education for a life of leadership and service to others cannot end with the awarding of a diploma.
- ° The world is too complex, too connected, too rapidly changing to allow a "finished" stamp on our intellects.
- ° Unless we realize that our education is unending, that graduation from college and university is only one step, can we avoid the death of the mind at an early age.
- ° Without continued education, we will slowly drift back to a new kind of dark age in which the "high priests of technology" will control the information and tell the rest of us what we should know, believe and do.

-18-

Those from the tradition of experimental colleges and universities can take pride in the knowledge that the agenda for today and tomorrow must deal with the issues faced forthrightly by you and your predecessors 25 years ago.

But a sense that the prophet has come to pass and a nostalgia for past battles does not promise sustenance for the future. Our problems will not tolerate a sentimental journey to the good old days, though, we know that there are people in this country's political and educational leadership who would solve our contemporary distress with a hurried retreat to the past.

The pride in past accomplishments is enhanced by the realization that the innovations the experimental schools pioneered have been adopted by the more traditional institutions. Where, then, are the experimental schools to go?

Answering is not easy or painless. It needs to be addressed before the coming of what Antioch's Bill Birenbaum describes "moment-to-moment survival actions' that lead to "distortions of history, to cynicism and a dream of our self-confidence about the future, and to misuses of money and muscle too often reducing our highest ideals to mere platitudes."

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Just as the experimental colleges and universities 25 years ago accepted and honored the individuality and independence of the student, so you must do today.

-19-

You again show the way in expanding opportunity while maintaining a high standard of scholarship.

Too often, sadly, in today's higher education, the goals of quality and access are seen in confrontation. The result can be turmoil that exhausts the participants in debates over theory. What is needed is a good honest effort at providing education of quality to all who seek it.

This problem takes on increased urgency as we view today's high school.

At Carnegie, we have gotten deeply involved in a study of the American high school. Already we know that if we are to achieve quality while providing access,

- o The purposes of education must be clarified.
- o School leadership must be strengthened.
- o Curriculum must be more sharply focused.
- o Somehow, the rigid four-year lockstep must be broken.

Who better than you, the leaders of the experimental university and college, can undertake the innovations to make the high school, the postsecondary school and the business community collaborators in the education of the new student body?

In the tradition of the experimental school, what appear to be problems are actually opportunities. Today, in 1981, and into the next century, the changing face, color and language of America will be your laboratory.

You, more than many others, know that theory requires flexibility, alteration and risk to become a reality that works. Proclaiming school-college "togetherness" is not making it work for the student or the institution.

- o I believe that school and college cannot do everything at once, and your history prepares you to deal with that.
- o I know that only when educators in high schools and beyond focus on one or two projects can serious cooperation occur.

Your quest since the beginning has been to open your doors to students who might not comfortably find places within the classrooms of the more traditional universities and colleges. To them, you have often shown the way. To the nation, you have been a symbol of the promise of equal opportunity. This nation still has miles to go before all of its people can reach for that equal opportunity. You can continue to show us how.

The second item on the agenda is an old familiar one: fixing the content of education to meet individual and societal needs. You can show the way again.

You can, for example, demonstrate how the nation's colleges and schools can move toward these absolutely urgent objectives:

- o acknowledgment of a common agenda
- o emergence of a true spirit of collaboration
- o identification of a single project
- o rewards for those involved
- o a focus on activities, not machinery.

As you have in the past and still do, you can arrange curricula that address contemporary concerns such as world hunger; the environment and energy; the interdependence of nations; coping with scarcity, limits to growth and equitable consumption of resources.

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The third item on our agenda of past, present and future is the ongoing redefinition of the place of education.

- o That same technology which has expanded the sites of learning will continue to develop. It must be mastered.
- o You can show the way to use the new technology to forge a new relationship between formal and informal teaching. Since, as Tim Pitkin put it, college is not a place, but a process, colleges and universities need to look at the combinations of lecture hall and TV screen, library and video disc, campus and home and factory, and, even, prison cell.

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The fourth item on our constant agenda is the time for learning.

We have proclaimed lifetime learning, shown its importance and its workability. More needs to be done:

- o The pace of discovery quickens.
- o As the world shrinks through instant communication that brings us live in living color in our living rooms Bjorn Borg and John McEnroe from Wimbledon's center court
- o As a shuttle carries our fellow passengers on planet earth to and from outer space and at supersonic speeds across oceans and continents

The world brings its problems to us immediately and dramatically.

The changing demography of America demands lifetime learning.

- o It is not so bad to be over 30 anymore. There are more of us.
- o People live longer, stay active longer, keep open their intellects and curiosities longer.

As I said previously, the innovations you pioneered are now standard. But there may be one large difference between the pioneers and the later settlers.

The pioneers hitched their wagons to a dream. They followed that dream through hostile territory, they braved rushing rivers and transversed high mountains because they believe that what they were doing was right. They reveled in the adventure; they rejoiced in the clarity of their goal.

I'm afraid that some of the settlers that came in after the pioneers do not share the same dreams or hold the same goals. They may live by the principles set by the experimental colleges and universities, but they don't believe them.

Burton R. Clark, professor of sociology at Yale, described the process undergone by the experimental colleges and universities as a common effort grounded on a system of belief.

"What counted," he said, "was the integrated meaning assigned to the bits and pieces, the way in which the participants saw their practices as the expression of a unified and unique approach that had been devised by hard work and struggle. It was their belief that counted most, their special sense of an institutional self, a phenomenon that could be referred to as an organizational saga or legend. The faculty, the students, and the alumni came to hold in common a credible story of uncommon effort and achievement."

-24-

In looking at selected experimental schools, he said he found that "the building of self-belief seemed central to the achievement of a distinctive place amidst a crowd of institutions."

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I believe that you have kept the faith that people like Tim Pitkin once preached.

I believe that you hold dearly to the principle that college is not a time and place, but a process.

I am confident that you see the lifelong education of the individual as an integral element of civilization.

Whether those same beliefs and principles are held by the institutions which have adopted your methodologies remains, I believe, uncertain. I suspect there are some who in their own effort to survive have adopted the methodologies without believing them. In some instances, it is a response to the buyer's market that students now command.

You, inheritors of the faith of the experimental college and university, you, who genuinely hold that education must be student-centered and can be with an enhancement of quality, you must be prepared to undertake a new mission.

And that is to show the doubters still among us that the flexibility you have advocated is medicine you are willing to prescribe for yourself and to take, however bitter tasting it may be for the moment.

You may have to choose the unpleasant:

- o Fewer courses.
- o Tougher standards
- o Higher student to faculty ratios.
- o Leaner administrations.

If in the process of adapting to changing conditions, you demonstrate the vitality of the experimental college and university, and you develop new methodologies to cope with fresh demands, you will have fixed even more securely your place in higher education.

You may not be wavering in self-belief, but that self-belief will certainly be strengthened by your meeting and overcoming the challenges you now face.

Armed with renewed confidence, reinforced by new experiences, the glad bearer of the tidings that quality and access can be delivered, you will spread the proud message throughout American higher education.

You will convince the doubters. You will build their self-belief, reinforce their own integrity, and, above all, do what you know how to do and have been doing: educate for a lifetime of service.