Character And Community During The College Years: The Rationale

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A Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the Sierra Project Center for the Study of the Freshman Year Experience
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About the Front Cover

The cover design, featuring the Chambered Nautilus (N. Pompilius, Linn.), is the inspiration of Mitch Weiss at the University of California, Irvine. He read portions of this monograph in its manuscript form and subsequently prepared several drafts from which this cover was selected. Apart from the subtlety and attractiveness of what Mitch has developed, the metaphor itself is highly appropriate, for it symbolically illustrates the growth process which occurs in the development of character.

In contrast to the occupants of "ordinary shells," whose bodies fill the entire shell cavity,

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the animal of the nautilus uses only a small portion of the shell or outer chamber,
and builds pearly partitions behind its body as it increases in size, although a
slender fleshy cord extends from the body through all the partitions, thus forming
an anchor or mooring to the shell (Verrill, 1936, p. 150).
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Several stanzas of *The Chambered Nautilus*, by Oliver Wendell Holmes, describe the growth of the nautilus and parallel the growth which occurs in the character development of college students:

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Year after year beheld the silent toil
That spread his lustrous coil;

Still, as the spiral grew,
He left the past year’s dwelling for the new,
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
Built up its idle door,
Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old no more...

“Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!

Leave thy low-vaulted past!

Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life’s unresting seal”
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Key elements of the growth process of the nautilus and the Sierra Project conception of growth in the development of character are the leaving of the last year for the new, no longer being the person one was before, and the expectation that the next conception of life will be “nobler than the last.”
Appreciations

This opportunity is especially welcome to express appreciation to the individuals whose efforts made the founding of the Sierra Project possible. The student staff were key partners in crafting the vision and its implementation: (1975) Mundo Norte (RA), Jeanette Caldeira, Jocelyn Campos, James Harrison, Kim Kreiling, Chris Leatherwood, Jeanette Eberhardy; (1976) James Harrison (RA), Kevin Clover (RA), Maureen Burris, J. Steven Jennings, Susan Lindsey, Chuan Ren, Valerie Samuel, Norma Yokota, Mundo Norte; (1977) Maureen Burris (RA), Gregory Bolles, Robert Burbank, James Fiorino, Jose Leal, Grizel Norte, Mary Ann Skorpanich, J. Steven Jennings (curriculum coordinator); (1978) Bridgette Berry (RA), J. P. Congleton, John Elston, Carlyle Kidd, Teresa Martinez, Pamela McZeal, Lisa Stangl, Maureen Burris (curriculum coordinator).

Journals have been required of all participants in the project. These journal readers in the founding years provided detailed feedback to Sierra freshmen, and helped create a supportive environment: Pamela Burton, Jeanette Eberhardy, Carol Findlay-Ducoff, Holly Magana, Dave Marrero, Martha Morgan, Molly Slaten, Karen Vogel, and Edward Weeks.

The contributors to the Character Development in College Students volumes are very special: Nevitt Sanford, Arthur Resnikoff, J. Steven Jennings, Loren Lee, Holly Magana, James B. Craig, Norma Yokota, Barbara Bertin, Martha Morgan, Pat Hill, Ralph L. Mosher, and Norman A. Sprinthall.

The ideas which were incorporated into the curriculum reflect the contribution of practioneers too numerous to mention, but several scholars and theoreticians had a profound effect on the shaping of the project activities: Carl R. Rogers, Ralph L. Mosher, James R. Rest, Norman A. Sprinthall, Lawrence Kohlberg, B.F. Skinner, and Nevitt Sanford.

The proximate empirical measures of character which have been constructed and refined over the past two decades have opened up new avenues of inquiry. The advancement of research endeavors in principled thinking, ego development, and moral maturity is particularly attributable to: James R. Rest, Jane Loevinger, Ruth Wessler, Anne Colby, Elizabeth Speicher-Dubin, John Gibbs, Dan Candee, and Lawrence Kohlberg.

The Sierra Project approach to evaluation and its implementation is especially indebted to three individuals: Karen H. Nelson, the initial project evaluator who brought to our attention recent advances in developmental psychology and life-span developmental research; and Holly Magana and Norma Yokota, principal data analysts for the Sierra Project who established the system files and trained our subsequent data analysis teams. The technical creation and availability of the Character Development in College Students series itself-its aesthetics, its physical presence, its progress through the design phase, and its distribution—has benefited from the contributions of many different talented people: Vivian Chang, Helen Cernik, Herman Williams, and Lori Webb.

The founding curriculum was delivered to four groups of Sierra Hall residents (the classes of 1979, 1980, 1981, and 1982) without whose wholehearted participation this project and its associated research studies would not have yielded the increased understanding of character development.
Our most heartfelt gratitude goes to two individuals who have been mentioned earlier: James B. Craig and Norma Yokota who have been with the Sierra Project since its inception. James B. Craig was the central contact person in the Housing Office, a major contributor to curriculum development, the person responsible for overseeing student staff selection, an author of Volume II, and the principal classroom instructor in Sierra Hall for 23 years. Norma Yokota has also been with the Sierra Project throughout its duration. She has been a resident of Lago, a student staff member in Sierra, a principal data analyst and supervisor of the data analysis team, an author of Volume II and other publications about Sierra, and the co-author of this monograph.

This 2014 monograph benefitted immensely from the design skills of Mitch Weiss in UC Irvine Student Housing. He crafted the image on the cover, the frontpiece and the layout of Chapter One.

The inaugural event where the monograph was distributed was under the auspices of Alicia Cornish, the Senior Executive Director of UC Irvine Student Housing. This memorable event was a conversation featuring UC Irvine Vice Chancellor Thomas Parham with John N. Gardner and Betsy Barefoot from the John N. Gardner Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Education from Brevard, North Carolina. The thoughtful leadership of Alicia Cornish is a cornerstone of the future of the Sierra Project as a collaboration across Student Affairs, the Division of Undergraduate Education, and the School of Social Ecology.

The Sierra Project has had only three instructional leaders over the first forty years. Their selfless devotion and commitment of time have earned the profound gratitude of the 2000 alumni of Sierra as well as the sponsors of the Sierra Project: Janet Clark Loxley, James B. Craig, and Natalie Schonfeld.

Colleagues from the University of South Carolina over the years have been a source of inspiration for their transformative contributions to undergraduate education as well as for the opportunity they have provided to make common cause with them: John N. Garner, Mary Stuart Hunter, Betsy Barefoot, Tracy Skipper, and Dorothy Fidler.

The John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education in Brevard, North Carolina Education and its founders John N. Gardner and Betsy Barefoot, along with Nevitt Sanford and Ralph L. Mosher, have offered a collective vision of what a transformed educational experience can impart to the next generation of citizens and leaders of a democratic society.

The Sierra Project would not have been possible without the contributions and long-term commitment of this extraordinary group of individuals.

John M. Whiteley
Irvine, California
March 3, 2014
Character and Community During the College Years
Chapter 1
John M. Whiteley and Norma Yokota

This is the 40th anniversary of the initiation of the Sierra Project. It was founded by a diverse group of students, staff and faculty at the University of California, Irvine in 1974. The inspiration for the Sierra Project emerged from summer conferences in 1973 and 1974, which had brought to UC Irvine theorists and researchers with very original ideas on what institutions of society can do to promote an enhanced sense of equity and justice and make education more meaningful and transformative for learners. The concepts which each of the presenters brought were very different, and the empirical measures they had developed were equally diverse, ranging from qualitative and case study approaches to scientific research to more quantitative approaches, which had been standardized on multiple populations.

When a broad constituency of UC Irvine colleagues began substantive planning for the Sierra Project, they were able to draw ideas and inspiration from these very different perspectives:

From Lawrence Kohlberg and Peter Scharf there had been active work in prisons to raise the level of moral reasoning of inmates. Kohlberg, in a pioneering doctoral dissertation, had conceptualized a theory of stages of moral reasoning and a (more) qualitative measurement system based on moral dilemmas.

From Ralph L. Mosher and Norman A. Sprinthall there was a highly original approach to deliberate psychological education based on older students working with younger students. In a program at Brookline High School, called the “School within a School,” there had been developed an approach to thinking through broader self and societal issues in a context of a more “just” and democratic participatory community.

From James Rest there had emerged a theoretically rich set of empirical studies of very different populations using the “Defining Issues Test” and its principled thinking measure. A central finding of Rest and associates was that increased years of formal education were associated with higher levels of more principled thinking in decision-making on moral challenges.

From their very different approaches to conceptualizing what really matters in education, centered around the work of Carl R. Rogers and B.F. Skinner, there was convergence on the importance of learning under positive conditions.

From a societal perspective, the important approaches to education and research—which had been presented at the
developmental educational conferences at UC Irvine in 1973 and 1974—had occurred in public schools or prisons. A consensus determination by UC Irvine colleagues from across the campus was to undertake the creation of an extended freshmen year initiative at the college level which would focus on promoting dimensions of character assessed across a number of empirical measures, in the context of a greater sense of community and personal support.

As discussions evolved, it became clear that a deficiency of the efficient approach—which universities had historically taken, organizing their relationship to students around academic disciplines—had, as a negative consequence, letting random events and power of pervasive peer culture have a dominant role in shaping the personal development of entering college students.

Further, there was, in the 1970s, a growing body of evidence that college students will be more effective in utilizing what they learn in college if they have developed psychological and personal skills in addition to those provided by traditional academic disciplines. After reviewing the literature, which supports this view, Sprinthall concluded that “life skills and success after the completion of formal education are most closely related to psychological maturity than to scholastic aptitude or grade point achievement” (Sprinthall, 1980, p. 362). It was this body of literature and the discussion of it in 1973 and 1974 which led the Sierra Project planning group to conclude that society, and therefore the university, had a vested interest in developing effective ways to influence the personal development of students during their college years.

The Sierra Project was initiated within the context of a comprehensive, research-oriented major public university. The students who chose to participate did so within the traditional framework of a program of academic study organized around discipline-based instruction. The great majority of freshmen students who have selected Sierra over the years have planned on further study beyond the baccalaureate degree. They were consequently involved in academically challenging freshman year programs—usually including introductory courses in mathematics, English, chemistry, a foreign language, and so forth, according to their specific academic major and prior level of preparation.

It is our conviction from experience that the elective academic courses of the Sierra Project—and the extracurricular residence hall experiences it supplies during the freshman year—are flexible enough for students to advance in their core academic work and still participate fully in a special curricular experience intended to influence their character development. That conviction has been developed and sustained by our forty-year odyssey. We established a longitudinal research program to study students’ development on dimensions of character throughout their undergraduate years, organized an integrated and challenging curriculum to foster character development, and worked

There was, in the 1970s, a growing body of evidence that college students will be more effective in utilizing what they learn in college if they have developed psychological and personal skills in addition to those provided by traditional academic disciplines.
with the freshmen in the classroom and resident hall to provide the basic intervention. The Sierra Project takes its name from Sierra Hall in the Mesa Court housing complex.

A Rationale for the Sierra Project

For school and society, character education represents an opportunity to influence the structure of thinking of the next generation of citizens—those persons who will lead and serve our institutions and, as parents, shape the nature of future generations. Young people are especially open to new influences during their years in college. They come into contact with a wide variety of new associations and ideas, in an environment where improving the quality of thinking is a primary goal. A growing body of literature indicates that young people will be more effective in utilizing what they learn in school if they have developed psychological and personal skills (such as those derived from character education) in addition to those provided by the traditional high school and college curricula.

The Sierra Project seeks to influence the development of college students on dimensions of character. There had been very little previous research on the character development of college students and the factors which influence it. Therefore, the Sierra Project is also a longitudinal study of: 1) the effects of a new approach to character education, and 2) the character development of students during the college years.

The Research Tradition Which Influenced the Curriculum and Evaluation

In the past decades there has been a veritable explosion of knowledge about the psychological and intellectual development of college students and the role which colleges and universities can have in influencing the course of that development. New insights have come principally from a series of research studies conducted throughout the country, which have their theoretical bases in developmental and counseling psychology.

These studies have been conducted in an educational and psychological terrain previously charted by three different types of studies: those on the impact of college experience (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969; Newcomb, 1967; Astin, 1977; Chickering and Associates, 1981), those on the psychological development of college students (Sanford, 1956, 1962; White, 1952; Katz, 1968; Chickering, 1969; King, 1973; Sanford and Axelrod, 1979; Chickering and Associates, 1981; Heath, 1968), and those on the developmental stages which characterize the shift from late adolescence to early adulthood (Kohlberg and

Closely related to this latter line of studies is the research which has examined the notion of sequencing educational experiences based upon the developmental level of the student (Rest, 1974, 1979; Knefelkamp, 1974; Perry, 1970, 1981; Whiteley, 1980; Whiteley and Associates, 1982). This line of inquiry is based on what is known as cognitive developmental theory, originating with the work of Piaget (1932, 1960).

The focus of the curriculum development and research evaluation, reported herein, is on one domain within the cognitive-developmental tradition: character development as it encompasses the constructs of principled thinking, moral maturity, and ego development. There is a broader concern, however, relating back to the genesis of scholarly inquiry into the interaction of college students and the university as an institution: that of the impact of the college experience on students and on the growth tasks which college students are confronting in the transition from late adolescence to early adulthood.

The research focus of the Sierra Project is directed to understanding the individual, and then to his or her relationship to others in the university setting. A description of the context (physical, social, and psychological) in which that individual is developing is an adjunct to an analysis of the wholeness of a life in the process of attaining adulthood in our society. Sanford (1982) has characterized such an approach as personology, a consideration of the person in his or her entirety. This fundamental approach is reflected in the choices which have been made about how to evaluate the Sierra Project: a decision to focus both on aspects of the individual in the context of the group (the Survey Design as reported in Whiteley, 1980; and Whiteley and Associates, 1982) and the individual in the context of his or her life, as documented in intensive case studies (the Intensive Design as reported in Whiteley, 1980; and Whiteley and Associates, 1982).

The Six-Part Rationale for Character Education During the College Years

The Sierra Project presents a curriculum designed to develop in university students a greater capacity for ethical sensitivity and awareness, an increased regard for equity in human relationships, and the ability to translate this enhanced capacity and regard into a higher standard of fairness and concern for the common good in all realms of their lives. These accomplishments are viewed as ultimately self-rewarding. Their development
constitutes a central rationale for the Sierra Project’s effort at character education. There is, however, a second rationale which is to be found in the benefit to society of a citizenry whose lives are characterized by principled thinking and moral maturity. Such individuals will be more responsible citizens, leaders, participants, and parents. Society as a whole is therefore a beneficiary of character education for college students.

Personal growth and psychological maturity are closely related to many dimensions of accomplishment in adulthood (Sprinthall, 1980; Sprinthall, Bertin, and Whiteley, 1986). The Sierra Project’s approach to character education emphasizes ego development and the achievement of a higher level of moral reasoning in order to produce general personal growth and psychological maturity in interpersonal relationships. Therefore, a third rationale for the Sierra Project is in the ultimate benefit to its participants throughout their adult lives in terms of greater potential for accomplishment.

The fourth rationale for the Sierra Project is the impact of moral and psychological education programs on the level of moral reasoning and ego development of junior high school, high school, and college students (Rest, 1979; Mosher and Sprinthall, 1971; Mosher, 1979; Scharf, 1978; Erickson and Whiteley, 1980; Whiteley and Bertin, 1982). The evidence is conclusive that properly sequenced educational and psychological experiences raise the level of moral reasoning and ego development of adolescents and young adults. This research is extraordinarily hopeful in its implications for society: education can make a difference to the moral reasoning of the citizenry.

Inquiry into devising curricula for character education, however, is in its infancy. Research has just begun on the crucial problem of determining the optimal match between the developmental level of students and the sequencing of educational experiences. Nonetheless, the legacy of the past decades is one of documenting the extraordinary potential of our educational institutions for positively impacting the character of students.

The fifth rationale for the Sierra Project is the nature of the challenges addressed during the four years of undergraduate education. For perhaps the first time in their lives, college students are physically and psychologically autonomous from those who have previously been highly influential in their lives: parents and siblings, school-age chums, and high school teachers and friends. Since the vast majority of beginning college students reason in a highly conventional manner, their moral referents are those people immediately around them. It is to significant others and to the peer group that college students look for guidance in formulating their thinking about ethical issues. In most high schools there is a homogeneity of influences. The typical college environment, however,
contains the opportunity for exposure to, and intellectual confrontation with, diversity in beliefs, lifestyles, and personality types. This is especially the case where there is a coed, multicultural, and mixed socio-economic population, as in the Sierra Project.

A further reason why the college years forcefully impact moral reasoning is the challenge of the growth tasks of late adolescence and early adulthood: securing identity, seeking intimacy, choosing enduring values, and initiating career and educational explorations of crucial significance. Each of these tasks contains the seeds of significant moral dilemmas. Their satisfactory resolution involves thoughtful moral choices. The extraordinary opportunity provided by the college years for impacting moral reasoning, therefore, is a fifth rationale for character education in the university.

A sixth rationale for the Sierra Project is a declarative statement about a central purpose of higher education and about what should be provided as an educational challenge to the men and women of all ages who spend a vitally important segment of their lives studying and learning in colleges and universities: An experience in higher education should provide an opportunity to reflect on the purposes of learning, on the uses to which acquired knowledge is put, and on the ethical dilemmas which confront citizens individually and as members of society collectively.

This is a viewpoint which considers an essential goal of a college education to be the cultivation of a capacity for reflection about, and analysis of, issues in society both of a personal and a collective nature. While consistent with purposes of a college education as preparation for life and career, and as a time for personal development, this sixth rationale stresses the importance of achieving a capability for integrating these two aspects of experience during the college years. It is a statement that the opportunity to focus on the process of learning, to think carefully about questions of values and valuing, is vital to a well-rounded college student. All too often such an opportunity is insufficiently a part of the usual experience at college and university.

**IN SUMMARY,** there is a six-part rationale for promoting the character development of college students:

1. For individuals, it is ultimately self-rewarding to have a greater capacity for ethical sensitivity and regard for equity in human relations.
2. Society benefits from citizens whose lives are characterized by principled thinking and moral maturity.

3. For individuals, the development of increased psychological maturity leads to greater accomplishment in adulthood.

4. Research has shown that educational experiences can raise the level of moral reasoning.

5. Experiences during the college years provide many opportunities for impacting moral reasoning.

6. Higher education should provide students with an opportunity for reflection on knowledge, values, and moral choices.

**Themes and Value Statements of the Sierra Project**

A dominant theme of the Sierra Project is that the residence hall for freshmen students is a crucible for human development at the transition from late adolescence to early adulthood. The freshman year is the first time when entering first year college students confront, largely alone, personal and professional choice dilemmas posed by the collegiate curricular and extracurricular college life.

**Governance Context**

Governance of the college residence hall has undergone a profound change over the history of higher education in America. It has evolved from more engagement by faculty in the earlier years and greater supervision of student life and conduct to an era where responsibility for governance is on other university professionals, and more responsibility is vested in students themselves to guide their own conduct wisely.

The University of California, Irvine operates within a formal structure of “shared governance.” Faculty have responsibility for the formal curricula and for the specification of the general education requirements for breadth of educational experiences which define the meaning behind the phrase “an educated person” for their university. The Sierra Project was established as a freshman year program in this context.

**Hybrid Governance of the Sierra Project**

The governance of the Sierra Project is a hybrid: it has been a genuine collaboration between students, staff, and faculty from its inception in 1974. There has been an effort to
make the most of the largely untapped opportunity of residential education as expressed by the following:

• The college years should provide an opportunity for young people to decide for themselves key dimensions of the purpose of an educated, reflective life.
• The pace of moral maturity accelerates during the college years, and academic and experiential programs can modulate and enhance that acceleration.
• The experience of being away for the first time from previously psychologically dominant family and high school peers serves to enhance the potential impact of new ways of thinking about ideas and personal encounters.
• The maturation of research on that portion of life-span developmental psychology which studies the growth of moral reasoning has revealed that it is possible to assess reliably an individual’s level of moral reasoning.
• Formal education has been found to have a critically positive relationship to moral reasoning, and a properly sequenced stage-relevant curriculum can be especially influential on late adolescents.

Guiding Value Statements

The Sierra Project has been guided over the years by three interrelated value statements: college educators have the responsibility to provide a context where moral issues can be addressed reflectively by college students; the curricula can stimulate thinking about the purposes to which an education can be put by examining the moral challenges which are revealed with appalling regularity in the broader society; and students, staff, and faculty can work together to assign a higher priority to invigorating the process of moral and intellectual maturation.

Providing an Educational Environment Where Moral Issues Can Be Addressed

The first value statement is that college educators have a responsibility to provide an educational environment where moral issues can be addressed reflectively by college students. They already have the means.

College educators define the characteristics of an undergraduate education in two profound ways: in their control of the curriculum and in their definition of the policies and procedures which govern life outside the classroom.
Thinking About Purpose Beyond College: The “Human and Moral” Choices

The second value statement is that providing an opportunity for reflection on moral issues in the broader society is important. Freshmen will join the broader society in four short years. At that time they must make the most profound choices about the purpose to which they will put their educations and the criteria they will choose for their personal decision-making.

The Sierra Project began during the end of the Vietnam War and as the Watergate scandal was concluding. Mark Russell, the legendary musician/comedian of foibles in the Nation's capital, used to joke that during the Watergate era he did not even need to write his own material any more—he could just “rip and read” from the newspapers. The Vietnam War was just coming to a close with the loss of 58,000 American lives. Less well understood at the time was that beyond that tragedy at least twenty Asian lives had been lost for that of every American.

When the Sierra Project curricula was first developed in the middle of the 1970s, David Halberstam’s hauntingly titled book, The Best and the Brightest, had just appeared, detailing how America got into the Vietnam quagmire, guided by a series of decisions in the 1950s and 1960s which had been made by the “best and the brightest” products of American higher education.

Morally insensitive actions by the leadership of American society was not a new phenomenon of the last quarter of the 20th century. But with the increasingly fragile interdependence of life on the Planet, the awesome destructive power of advanced technology, and the continuing plague of inhumanity around the globe, producing more sensitive ethical leadership is an imperative. It is the next generation of community and global leadership which is in attendance now at colleges and universities.

During the decade of the 1980s there were many opportunities to reflect on the issues in society underlying the Encyclical by Pope John Paul II of May 2, 1991 surrounding giving capitalism a “human face.” Pope John Paul II had directed attention to the existence of a form of ownership: “the possession of know-how, technology, and skill.” He elaborated as follows:

Profit is a regulator of the life of a business, but it is not the only one; other human and moral factors must be considered which, in the long term, are at least equally important for the life of a business.


With the increasingly fragile interdependence of life on the Planet, the awesome destructive power of advanced technology, and the continuing plague of inhumanity around the globe, producing more sensitive ethical leadership is an imperative.
In the American system of secular education, colleges and universities have the principal opportunity of all institutions of society for educating the next generation of leaders about, in Pope John Paul II’s words, the “human and moral” factors which must be considered. With respect to those college graduates whose “know-how, technology and skill” with responsibility and authority in areas requiring “human and moral factors” in decision-making, there has been an evolution in the mythology about the dominant villains in society.

It used to be that the mythology was about the old villains of yester year: the bank robbers with known characters like Willie Sutton, and Bonnie and Clyde. They were battled relentlessly on behalf of values of law and order and the welfare of society by agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

As the Sierra Project began working on developing its curricula, the old mythology of villains began being replaced by new villains: the most privileged and highly educated members of society. In the area of Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical, the new villains had mastered the technical skills but not the human and moral values of a college education.

The new villains made an art form out of robbing, by ownership and not at gun point, the savings and loan industry and America’s financial markets. In the 1980s whether it was the greed and excess of the Wall Street takeover mania using junk bonds or the billions of dollars stolen through fraudulent manipulation of Lincoln Savings, Columbia Savings, and a host of others, the common thread was the criminal misuse of some of the finest college and university educations in the world. Michael Douglas brought to life Gordon Gecko in his classic “Greed is Good” speech in Oliver Stone’s movie, Wall Street. This created a “teaching moment” on ethical responsibility in the workplace.

The Enron scandal, memorialized in the book and movie, The Smartest Guys in the Room, began in the late 1980s when it started trading natural gas commodities. By the late 1990s they were manipulating the California deregulated energy market, adopting accounting practices to make investors think their balance sheet was stronger than it was, and hiding losses on a massive scale. In 2001, Auditor Arthur Anderson LLP destroyed one ton of Enron financial records. Enron went from being the sixth largest company, to filing for bankruptcy. Arthur Anderson LLP was indicted by the Department of Justice. It surrendered its business license, and 85,000 people lost their jobs. In 2004, Enron CEO Jeff Skilling plead not guilty to a 35 count indictment. Founder and Board Chairman Ken Lay plead not guilty to 11 criminal charges and proclaimed his innocence, saying that only a
“superman” could have known all that was going on in the company. In 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the conviction of Arthur Anderson LLP. In 2006 Chairman Ken Lay was found guilty of six criminal counts and died of a heart attack just over a month after his conviction. CEO Jeff Skilling was found guilty of 19 criminal charges and received a 24-year prison sentence. An examination of the immoral choices in The Smartest Guys in the Room provides another “teaching moment” on ethical responsibility in the workplace.

What had been the country’s sixth largest company by value had cheated thousands of investors (including a University of California investment fund) and its employees out of billions, for the enrichment of insiders, then collapsed in one of the country’s largest financial scandals.

The moral lessons embedded in insider trading and deceiving investors and loyal employees at Enron reemerged unaddressed only a few years later in the sub-prime mortgage meltdown.

The beginning years of the 21st century have not failed to add more real life examples of the technologically accomplished who made deliberate choices to act in narrow self-interest.

The beginning years of the 21st century have not failed to add more real life examples of the technologically accomplished, who made deliberate choices to act in narrow self-interest. In a large undergraduate class of over 300 beginning college students, there was not a single student in the classroom who did not know personally of someone who had lost their home in the subprime mortgage meltdown (with almost no one going to jail for their self-interested behavior).

As John Gardner points out in his chapter on residential education, a particularly difficult source of anxiety for this generation of college students is the insidious combination of early debt and finding that homes worth living in are priced beyond their affordability.

The point is that the college years, both within the living-learning community itself, and in the broader society, offer their own version of what musician/comedian Mark Russell characterized as no longer having to write his own material.

Training the Next Generation of Leaders

The third value statement is the special responsibilities of colleges and universities for training the next generation of society’s leadership.

That distinguished philosopher of higher education and the American scene, Doonesbury, presented a very similar rationale in one of the commencement address vignettes which Gary Trudeau has written on various occasions. In addressing the assembled graduates, the commencement speaker commented with concern upon the students’ “obsessive concern for the future,” an approach which has been "the salient shaping influence on your attitudes
during a very critical four years ...” He then went on to state eloquently: “It could have been more than that. This college offered you a sanctuary, a place to experience PROCESS, to FEEL the present as you moved through it, to EMBRACE both the joys and sorrows of moral and intellectual maturation! It needn’t have been just another way-station... .” (Trudeau, 1972).

In colleges and universities, it is the combined choice of faculty, trustees, professional staff and administration whether to elect to structure undergraduate education as “just another way-station” or as a sanctuary in which to embrace “both the joys and sorrows of moral and intellectual maturation.”

At the level of extraordinary opportunity and potential this is the, as yet to be realized, special responsibility of colleges and universities to enhance their contribution to the creation of a more just and humane society.

References


Part I

Thinking About Goals and Outcomes of Colleges and Universities

Nevitt Sanford
“Creating a New Educational Environment Guided by a Conception of the Whole Person”

Ralph L. Mosher
“Why Character Education in College”
Nevitt Sanford

Nevitt Sanford in “Creating a New Educational Environment Guided by a Conception of the Whole Person” begins by reminding readers of the structure and purposes of the humane and humanizing universities of the 1920s and 1930s. This era of higher education achieved greatness based on “a clear vision of goals and a willingness to organize effort in their pursuit.”

In contrast, after World War II, American universities have expanded and become differentiated at a rate “far beyond their capacity to achieve the integration which is necessary to any living system.” Central to the expansion and differentiation of the American university has been the “fantastic proliferation of departments, specialties within departments, institutes, centers, and programs each of which, in major universities have behaved as an independent principalities, bent on its own aggrandizement, relating less to other substructures in the same institution than to outside constituents, markets, and sources of funds.”

The vision of Nevitt Sanford is rooted both in his personal experiences in higher education over more than half a century but also in an ambitious research program begun in the 1950s. There are several elements to the vision which may be understood by how he would answer fundamental questions:

Can we have community without ethnocentrism? He would answer “Yes!”.

“This kind of development can be brought about through education at the college level. It is partly a matter of learning to think well, and partly a matter of character development.”

What do we desire of our college graduates?

“...a capacity for group loyalty and tolerance of other groups, identity and intimacy, homonomy and autonomy. This requires that their personalities become sufficiently expanded, differentiated, and integrated so that opposite tendencies can be held in consciousness long enough for synergetic resolutions to be found.”

Professor Sanford has consistently argued that “the development of such personalities is the overarching aim of education...”

Is there an interaction between personality and learning? He would answer “Yes!”.

“Intelligence, feeling, emotion, and action can be separated conceptually but no one of them functions independently of the others.”

“Just as nothing is truly learned until it has been integrated with the purposes of the individual, so no facts and principles that have been learned can serve any worthy human purpose unless they are restrained and guided by character.”

What is the relationship between intellect/intelligence and human feeling?

“Intelligence without human feeling can be monstrous, while feeling without intelligence is childish; intelligence and feeling are at their highest and in the best relation one to another where there is a taste for art and beauty as well as an appreciation of logic and knowledge.”

A fundamental goal is education “guided by a conception of, and concern with, the whole person.”

As a researcher, he was most recognized for two lines of inquiry. The first line of inquiry was of prejudice and hatred culminating in his co-authorship of The Authoritarian Personality. The New York Times quoted social psychologist Susan Fiske of the University of Massachusetts as follows: “His work was inspired by trying to understand the hatred that caused the Holocaust...His ideas were seminal, a main taproot of all the later research on prejudice, as well as the field of social psychology.”

The second line of inquiry was on fundamental aspects of higher education begun in the 1950s. Among the publications which resulted from this body of work are: The American College: A Psychological and Social Interpretation of the Higher Learning, Where Colleges Fail and Self and Society: Social Change and Individual Development. Among his most influential articles on college students are “Research with Students as Action and Education” in the American Psychologist, and “Personality Development During the College Years” in the Personnel and Guidance Journal.
Creating a New Educational Environment Guided by a Conception of the Whole Person

Chapter 2
Nevitt Sanford

American universities have been expanding and becoming differentiated at a rate far beyond their capacity to achieve the integration which is necessary to any living system. Particularly in the years since World War II we have seen a fantastic proliferation of departments, specialities within departments, institutes, centers, and programs, each of which, in the major universities, has behaved as an independent principality, bent on its own aggrandizement, relating less to other substructures in the same institution than to outside constituents, markets, and sources of funds. This has been going on long enough so that this model of a university is widely regarded as just a phenomenon of nature, something that the good Lord intended.

Enormous interest is vested in these present structures. It seems that only a few of us old-timers remember the humane and humanizing universities of the 1920’s and 1930’s, some of which surely achieved greatness - and this without huge inputs of funds from Washington or elsewhere. Their greatness depended on a clear vision of goals and a willingness to organize effort in their pursuit.

In my more despairing moments it seems to me that the modern university has succeeded in separating almost everything that belongs together. Not only have fields of inquiry been subdivided until they have become almost meaningless, but research has been separated from teaching, teaching and research from action, and, worst of all, thought from humane feeling.

The effects of these changes on students, especially undergraduates, have been devastating. It is fair to say that in most of our universities—and in many of our elite liberal arts colleges—a majority of the students suffer from a lack of a sense of community, confusion about values, a lack of intimate friends, a very tenuous sense of self (including serious doubt about their personal worth) and the absence of a great cause, movement, service, religion, belief system, or anything else that they might see of as larger than themselves and in which they could become deeply involved.

I conclude from this that those of us who care about the nation’s youth and their education must now work to construct conditions and promote values that we once took for granted.

Much of value was taken for granted at the University of Richmond (a small college with a law school) when I was there in the 1920’s. I am sure it never occurred to anyone to suggest that we ought to build community. Indeed, to have talked about community at that time and place would have been like talking to a fish about water. It was not only that students and faculty alike generally shared the same values but we all could upon occasion display our genuine school spirit. I belonged to a fraternity and to several athletic teams; and was best friends with a young man who shared my interest in academic work. I never
doubted that these young men cared for me and over the years I have always known that when I went back to Richmond we would take up our friendships just where we left off. My older fraternity brothers and teammates took pains to instruct me how to act in various social situations. At the same time I was sometimes able to help some fellow athletes with their homework; they took pride in the fact that one of them could “understand this stuff.” I was usually able to hold my own in the innumerable “bull sessions” we had.

I was never close to my professors, being too shy to take questions or problems to any of them. I can, however, call up vivid images of at least a dozen of these men. This, I think, is not so much because they were unusually individualistic, but because they expressed themselves more freely than do professors today. They were teachers above all else; they felt safe in saying what they pleased and, most important, we could “get them off the subject.” We wanted to know what they really felt and thought about issues and people, not just about Shakespeare or Bismarck but about H. L. Mencken, the Scopes trial, and the Soviet Union; in sum, about what interested us. Thus, they exposed themselves as whole persons and bearers of value.

One value that was universally espoused was that of liberal education. In “bull sessions” we debated whether the purpose of education was to learn “how to live” or “how to make a living” and came down overwhelmingly on the side of the former. Even those students who were bound for medicine, law, or the ministry thought the way to get started was to “get a liberal education.”

Most of us gave little thought to what we would do after college. All we were clear about was that we would stay as close as possible to the city of Richmond and maintain close ties with family and friends. They would find jobs for us, and if we got into trouble they would take care of us. We were under no pressure to establish our “vocational identities.” The selves we felt ourselves to be depended instead on such factors as family, locale, region, religion, ethnicity, school, and group memberships; also on interest, activities, and personal characteristics that were confirmed by others. The confirming—or disconfirming—of notions we had about ourselves was fairly easy in an environment where friends and relations cared enough to “straighten each other out.”

I, in company with many of my fellows, I believe, had a hard time finding out what I could and could not do, suffering more than a few painful blows to self-esteem in the process; but I never doubted that in some fundamental way I was, or would be, all right. This was not only because I knew I was loved by family and friends but because our professors somehow conveyed the idea that, despite our obvious shortcomings, great things were expected of us; the reason they berated us so often was because they believed that, some day, affairs of great moment could be left safely in our hands.

In sum, we had community; every opportunity for intimacy, values that were clearly defined and exemplified by professors, ways of defining ourselves that did not depend on achievement or vocational aspiration, and plenty of ways to satisfy our need for “homonomy.” This last is Andras Angyal’s term. He wrote that every individual needs not only autonomy but homonomy “to become an organic part of something he conceives as greater than himself—to be in harmony with super individual units, the social world,
nature, God, ethical world order, or whatever the individual’s formulation of it may be” (Angyal, 1941, p. 172). There were plenty of things around that people could throw themselves into: the Christian religion, the Baptist Church, Southern culture, the Democratic party, Sigma Phi Epsilon, football—to mention a few.

Richmond was not unique. In fact, it was very much like other small colleges of the time—not only in the South but nationwide. More than that, much of the culture and spirit I have tried to describe prevailed in the universities. To get along at Harvard, where I became a graduate student in 1930, all one had to do was to have some intellectual interests, to respect those of others, and to be civil in argument. The faculty displayed these values; they showed their concern for students and convinced us that they could be trusted. We students, knowing that we were in a system that really worked, felt no need to compete with each other. Instead, mutual help and cooperation were the order of the day and many enduring friendships were formed.

The University of California at Berkeley, in the early 1940’s, was even more a community than Harvard, even though there were 20,000 students around. It felt like a community. When Provost Monroe Deutsch spoke on formal occasions everybody felt that he spoke for us all. Professors in one department fraternized easily with professors in various others. Graduate students were happy and secure, for they knew that as long as they were serious and willing to work some professor would see them through to their degree. Assistant professors, such as I, were also secure, for we knew that having been brought into a departmental family we would be looked after and promoted in our turn. The psychology department at Berkeley was already famous in the 1930’s; yet it was not until 1947 that any assistant professor ever hired by that department was out instead of up.

When I went to work at Vassar College in 1952 I soon felt very much at home. The place was a lot like Richmond. Of course, the academic standards were higher, everybody was more serious about what they were doing, and there was greater liberalism in politics, but there was much of the sort of community I had grown used to. There was universal belief in liberal education and a generally agreed upon set of values, organized around something vaguely defined as “quality” This embodied some intellectual snobbery, but there was much more to it than that. The faculty cared about students and worked hard at their teaching. Although there was some social stratification in the student body there was much sisterliness and open display of loyalty to the school. It was generally agreed that Vassar was a place where “you made your life-long friends.”

But Vassar, like almost all other colleges and universities in the country; was to change. Shortly after World War II the federal government began pouring money into the universities to support research and graduate training. Soon the universities were putting more and more emphasis on research, less and less on teaching undergraduates. For example in the late 1940’s my colleagues and I in the psychology department at Berkeley set out to make ours the strongest department in the university and the strongest psychology department in the nation. We competed fiercely with other departments around the country in our effort to get the best young researchers. We did not ask if they could teach; to sweeten our offers, we made the proposed teaching load as light as possible and promised our new recruits that they could teach their specialities. The curriculum
proliferated wildly. At one time, unbeknownst to anybody in the department, the same text was being used in five courses, each with a different name. When our most senior professor retired there was no one around to worry about the integration of our curriculum. All that mattered was research and publication, and the training of graduate students in various specialities. In these circumstances nobody had time for undergraduates. They would have been dismissed altogether, I believe, were it not for the fact that the budget for psychology depended on how many undergraduate students we had.

What was happening in psychology, as I later learned, was happening in most other departments of the university, and what was happening at Berkeley was happening at universities all over the country. And after 1957, when Sputnik was launched, things took a turn for the worse. Now there was an increased accent on science and technology as a road to “national strength.” The kind of science that soon got the upper hand was that modeled after 19th century physics. Understanding was to be achieved by the analysis of phenomena into finer and finer bits. Knowledge of how things fit together could wait. The required rate of publication could not be sustained if professors addressed themselves to large or complicated issues. The research that was to save us from the Russians became more and more trivial. In psychology, issues of great moment were turned into methodological problems.

In the humanities as well as in the sciences the Western techno-scientific approach to knowledge became increasingly dominant. In the excitement following Sputnik there was general acceptance of the notion that American education was mediocre. Professors now felt that they had permission to do, and to do more rigorously, what they wanted to do anyway, that is, concentrate on their scholarly specialties in their teaching as well as in their research. Professors of literature, for example, instead of focusing on the task of making great works available to undergraduates, insisted on close reading, detailed analysis, and interpretation according to their preferred conceptual schemes. In philosophy, professors who wanted to reduce their discipline to arguments about what philosophy is, or to the analysis of linguistic minutiae, took a new lease on life.

Where in the curriculum, then, were students to find anything to nurture the spirit? How were they to attain broad understanding, to find out what it means to be human, to experience wonder, to acquire a sense of values?

The liberal arts colleges, particularly the elitist ones, followed the example of the universities. The departments evaluated themselves primarily on the basis of how many of their students gained admission to good graduate schools. The safest course was to teach these undergraduates what the professors knew would be taught again in graduate school.

By 1964, as it turned out, the situation had become explosive. The student protests that began at Berkeley in September, 1964 were in the beginning protests against the “irrelevance” of the curriculum and the “impersonality” of campus life. Although the students’ insistence on educational reform was soon forced into the background by protests against the Viet Nam War, it persisted and became a national movement. Great energy went into this movement, but it suffered from a lack of educational leadership. Many institutions just gave the students what they said they wanted, with small attention
to what they needed. Nevertheless many constructive things were done. Whole new institutions were started within and without existing colleges and universities; for example, the experimental colleges within the University of California, Berkeley, and New College in San Francisco. Unfortunately this was almost always done with soft money and very few of the innovations have persisted.

Today the excitement of the sixties and early seventies seems remote. With the end of the Viet Nam War in sight the student movement ran out of steam, as movements do, and inevitably some reaction set in. Up until quite recently, and still, institutions have been busy putting back into place things that were “dislocated” in response to student activism. Neither students nor university officers are thinking about educational reform. They have other things on their minds. Students, for their part, having decided to work within the system, are very much taken up with getting into professional schools and will do whatever is required. Professors, with only pliable students to deal with, feel free to do what they like most and do best, that is, research and teaching their specialties—preferably to graduate students.

Concern with moral values seems to have disappeared from the scene. If the university has any noble purposes, or any purposes beyond preparing students for vocations, keeping the wheels turning, and maintaining the standard of living, there does not seem to be anyone around to say what these purposes are. Even with the emphasis on ethics that followed Watergate, instruction in this area has been focused almost exclusively on how to analyze ethical issues, critique ethical positions, and avoid “moral indoctrination” (Bennett, 1980). Nobody is telling students that they ought to do better or be better persons, or suggesting what is better; nor do students have much opportunity to learn from the example of their elders. On every university campus there are, to be sure, professors who have the self-discipline that it takes to discover and to tell the truth. But there are more who present examples of competitiveness and acquisitiveness, absorption in narrow specialities, virtuosity untempered by humane feeling. For better or worse, however, students rarely get to know their professors well enough to consider them as models. “Getting them off the subject” went out of fashion some time ago.

What is even more to be regretted, professors do not know their undergraduate students. Last year I had a letter from a former Stanford student who was in prison for murder. He is a Viet Nam veteran who had become mentally disturbed and deeply involved with drugs. The prosecutor had tagged him a sociopath, and he needed the testimony of someone who knew him when he was a student. He had taken a lecture course from me and, for one quarter in 1963, a course in guided reading and research. We met six or eight times and he submitted a paper. He told enough in his letter about what he had said and what I had said so that, remarkably enough, I remembered him. I believe I was able to be of some help to him. But (and this is the point of the story) I was the only professional person at Stanford who had known him personally and who, as he thought, might conceivably remember him. And he was there for four years. A university can be a very cold place; I have no doubt that it is as cold today as it was in 1963.

One might think that students who are alienated from their professors—and probably from most other adults—would turn to one another for intimacy and support. But not so.
Colleagues and graduate students at the Wright Institute, who have been studying student life at Berkeley, tell me that these young people do not know how to make friends or behave on dates—that there is a distressing amount of loneliness on campus. I had observed the same phenomena at Stanford in the early 1960’s. Apparently there is so much competition for grades and status, so much uncertainty about who one is and what one can do, that students cannot expose themselves enough to make intimate relationships possible. Most of them, most of the time, are putting on some kind of act.

Equally distressing is the fact that they cannot talk over such problems among themselves. My Wright Institute informants interviewed, in considerable depth, 15 young men who lived in a nearby fraternity house. The plan was to use the major themes that came up in the interview as a basis for group discussion. As expected, the fraternity men enjoyed the interviews; they were open, sincere, willing to talk about serious problems. But when the three interviewers arrived at the fraternity house to hold the discussion the music was turned on, the beer had been distributed, and young women soon arrived. Of course there was no discussion. It was as if each individual personality had been dissolved in the group.

Many students have told me that they and their acquaintances could not organize discussions of serious questions. Not only were they too wary of one another, but there was the ubiquitous TV and record player. This is in contrast not only with the “good old days” but with the recent past when students were involved in efforts at educational or political change. There was plenty of communication among them then, and some of it was the sort that calls for self-revelation and leads to intimacy. What they had primarily was homonomy. And this raises the question of what is there today that students can lose themselves in. For many, no doubt, preparation for their chosen vocation is enough to capture their imaginations and use up their energies. Beyond that the scene appears bleak. There seems to be very little action on the political left. The women’s movement, demonstrations against nuclear weapons or in favor of environmental protection are still out there, but much of the life seems to have been drained from them. Clearly we need some new movements and, this time around, something that adults as well as students can throw themselves into. The fact that they long for homonomy is, I believe, one reason why students join cults or new religious groups.

In thinking of the pre-World War II university as a source of ideas about how we might improve the quality of campus life, and better assist students in their self-development, we must remember that the culture which prevailed then had its dark side. At Richmond there was universal and completely thoughtless racism. There were no Black students there, or at any college I knew of. Blacks were so submerged that we never saw them except in menial roles; and this state of affairs was regarded as natural. Certainly it was never discussed. I was more aware of anti-Catholicism, and may have participated in it; but the ethnocentrism that I experienced most vividly and expressed with the most enthusiasm was in connection with a traditional football rivalry. On our campus it was generally believed that William and Mary College imported “ringers,” (i.e., professional athletes, with strange ethnic backgrounds) who came from places like Jersey City, New Jersey. When we went into a game with this outfit it was virtually “holy war.” Some months after graduating from college I was approached on the New York subway by a smiling young man who happily identified himself as someone who had played against me in the last Richmond-William and
Mary game. I was struck dumb. Did he not realize that we were enemies, and that I would not be ready to make peace? He must have thought me a fool.

I might say in my own defense that people matured more slowly in those days than they do now; that it is probably better to display one’s ethnocentrism on the playing fields than to do so in the streets. More than that, I was still an adolescent when I graduated from college, and adolescents are entitled to some measure of ethnocentrism. Their big problem is what to do about the emotional impulses they regard as low; destructive, and dangerous. The conventional strategy for adolescents, and for people stuck at that stage of development, is to cling to a group or to groups that are seen as good like themselves and to see the “bad” as existing in other people, who are then put beyond the pale.

Can we, then, have community without ethnocentrism? I believe that we can. We may hope that, as they grow older, adolescents will come to see that their impulses need not be projected onto other people or stamped out completely: that they may, instead, be modified or controlled. This kind of development can be brought about through education at the college level. It is partly a matter of learning to think well, and partly a matter of character development. What we desire for our college graduates is a capacity for group loyalty and tolerance of other groups, identity and intimacy, homonomy and autonomy. This requires that their personalities become sufficiently expanded, differentiated, and integrated so that opposite tendencies can be held in consciousness long enough for synergistic resolutions to be found.

I have argued for more than a few years (Sanford, 1956, 1962a, 1962b, and 1980) that the development of such personalities is the overarching aim of education and that all the resources of our educational institutions should be put in its service. As various theorists have insisted, personality functions as a unit; its diverse features develop an interaction one with the other (Allport, 1937; Murray, 1938; Angyal, 1941). Intelligence, feeling, emotion, and action can be separated conceptually but no one of them functions independently of the others. I wrote in 1962: “Just as nothing is truly learned until it has been integrated with the purposes of the individual, so no facts and principles that have been learned can serve any worthy human purpose unless they are restrained and guided by character. Intellect without humane feeling can be monstrous, while feeling without intelligence is childish; intelligence and feeling are at their highest and in the best relation one to another where there is a taste for art and beauty as well as an appreciation of logic and knowledge” (Sanford, 1962b).

I believe the authors of the present volume will agree with this statement, for their work is in the same spirit. Although they focus on character, it is clear that in creating a new educational environment—which they did as part of their Sierra Project—they have been guided by a conception of and concern with, the whole person.

That environment, which is fully described here, deserves our best attention and careful study. It embodies in some degree all those things whose lack I have bemoaned in the above paragraphs. (In going on so long about the poor quality of student life generally, and about what we know; on the basis of the past, might be possible, my object has been to provide a background against which the significance of the Sierra Project may be highlighted.)
In this residential learning program we find a concern about values, opportunities to serve the larger community, close relations among faculty, staff and students, intensive small group discussions, special curricular experiences designed on the basis of developmental theory—in general a humanitarian and therefore humanizing environment. And all of this at the University of California, Irvine, an institution that prides itself on how rapidly it is becoming a great research university.

There are other projects and programs around the country that are based in theory and directed to the development of the student as a person. For example, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and at Azusa Pacific College students are provided with mentors and keep records of their activities and achievements. I know of no program, however, that is as comprehensive and far-reaching in its implications as the one being considered here.

The question is: What are the effects of the living-learning program on the students’ development—with special reference to character? Attempts to answer this question for freshmen who spent one year in the project are fully described in this book. Experimental evaluation with the use of tests and control groups was carried out with the rigor one would expect of U.C. Irvine. More to my liking, there was a great deal of interviewing and some case studies. Finally, I should say that the Sierra Project is not only a set of actions whose effects are then evaluated; it is also pure research on character development. This volume contains a thorough review of the literature on this subject but reports only part of the research results that are or will be available. Later reports will deal with the lasting effects of being in the program for freshmen and with the question of which educational procedures or experiences had what kinds of effects on which students. I can hardly wait.

References


Ralph L. Mosher

Ralph Mosher characterized the Sierra Project as “first and foremost, an experiment in the character education of college freshmen,” then shifted to an analysis and commentary on the rationales for character education offered by the Sierra Project.

An objective of the Sierra Project is to influence intentionally the moral thinking of the next generation of society’s leaders. For Professor Mosher, “the view that colleges should take seriously their own commencement rhetoric and consciously educate for character is the most challenging “raison d’etre.”

In a commentary on the Sierra Project rationale of the broader societal benefit from a “citizenry whose lives are characterized by principled thinking and moral maturity,” Professor Mosher remarked that this is close to John Dewey’s (1968) view that “the cause of education...is one of development, focusing indeed in the growth of students, but to be conceived even in this connection as part of the larger development of society.”

In commenting on other objectives of the Sierra Project, Professor Mosher’s observation was that “we have so little in the past to guide us” about “practical pedagogical knowledge” on character education:

“As an experiment in character education, Sierra also was positioned uniquely to contribute to an emerging body of applied research on how to relate what is being taught to that which students already know, where they are in the maturation of their moral thinking, understanding of themselves, and so on.”

Professor Mosher had strong views on character development as an aim of higher education:

“If I could choose but two competencies for my own children, rationality and character would be in a dead heat. Trying to know and do what is right is, I believe, at the heart of integrity.”

The context is acknowledgment that “institutions of higher education do affect students and powerfully so.”

Ralph L. Mosher was a Canadian by birth who completed his undergraduate study in Europe before earning a doctorate at Harvard University. He spent his academic career as an Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard and as Professor of Human Development and Counseling Psychology at Boston University.

Professor Mosher was author or co-author of 14 books and over 40 scholarly articles. His contributions to scholarship are wide-ranging: defining the process of counseling students and supervising counselors and teachers, research in counseling and developmental psychology, teacher and counselor effectiveness, curriculum development and reformulation in the areas of psychological and moral education, student and teacher attitudes toward school and learning, adolescent moral development, and the creation of democratic secondary schools and the study of their effect on the development of students.


Professor Mosher’s original work with Professor Norman Sprinthall on “Deliberate Psychological Education” which was published in The Counseling Psychologist has been especially influential in the development of the Sierra Project.

Professor Mosher was the first recipient of the Massachusetts Psychological Association’s Award for Distinguished Teaching in Psychology. The Dean of the School of Education at Boston University said of Professor Mosher “his profound service in, and contribution to, the School of Education, have helped to make the School what it is today. We know of our indebtedness to him for all he has done to elevate the goals of education and educational opportunity—not only here, but where ever his writings and his influence have touched.”
Why Character Education in College

Chapter 3

Ralph L. Mosher

The Sierra Project was, first and foremost, an experiment in the character education of college freshmen. The effort was to educate for principled thinking, greater moral maturity and ego development. How these ambitious objectives were defined we shall return to presently. But why character education in college? Whiteley and his associates believe it to be a crucial task of the university intentionally to influence the moral thinking of the next generation of society’s leaders. And in the direction of a more just society. For me, the view that colleges should take seriously their own commencement rhetoric and consciously educate for character is the most challenging of the *raisons d’etre* Whiteley puts forward in the introduction to this volume: “An experience in higher education should provide an opportunity to reflect on the purposes of learning, on the use to which acquired knowledge is put and on the ethical dilemmas which confront citizens individually and as members of society collectively.”

Sierra’s further reasons for doing character education included benefits *now* for those students affected: e.g. greater ethical awareness, concern for fairness and the welfare of others, “accomplishments which are ultimately self-rewarding.” There was a very interesting extension of the “benefits now” argument. It was the carefully documented thesis that personal growth and psychological maturity in one’s youth are closely related to many dimensions of accomplishment in adulthood. In the vernacular, them that has now, git’s later. Further, college students will become parents and leaders. Thus there is the broader societal benefit of a “citizenry whose lives are characterized by principled thinking and moral maturity.” This seems close to John Dewey’s view that “the cause of education … is one of development, focusing indeed in the growth of students, but to be conceived even in this connection as part of the larger development of society” (Dewey, 1968, p. 69).

Related objectives of the Sierra Project were to add to prior studies of the impact of the college experience on young people, the psychological development per se of college students and the broader transition from adolescence to young adulthood. As an experiment in character education, Sierra also was positioned uniquely to contribute to an emerging body of applied research on how to relate what is being taught to that which students already know, where they are in the maturation of their moral thinking, understanding of themselves, and so on. In short, it was to provide practical pedagogical knowledge of how to promote those competencies which Whiteley believes constitute character. Here, in the education of college students, we have had so little from the past to guide us.

Several personal reflections on character development as an aim of higher education may be pertinent. As a parent, a teacher of graduate students and an educator, I am in profound agreement with the rationale of the Sierra Project. If I could choose but two competencies for my own children, rationality and character would be in a dead heat. Trying to know and do what is right is, I believe, at the heart of integrity. Further, having taught for 25 years in
elitist institutions of higher education, I recognize that they do affect students and powerfully so. But it is the tacit and secular nature of the institutional norms which worry me. A pervasive idolatry of intellect; the pressures for academic and professional achievement at virtually any cost; the relative impact of studies in science, technology and management as compared to the humanities or normative philosophy; the “for sale” sign to corporate, foundation or government funding sources of many of our ablest professional minds and research centers are but a few of the institutional values which characterize the universities I have known.

The arrogance of “the best and the brightest” as to what is right for America and its ablest youth would be wonderfully ironic and diverting if it were not taken so seriously (as Vietnam was to make clear). Are not the academy’s epistemologies, our technologies, our co-option by American corporations, funding agencies, governments to be critically examined for their worth to the individual and his/her society? Do we not owe our youth such moral examination of the premises of their society and lives, if not our own? In this latter connection, are we as faculty and parents numb or desensitized to our socio-moral compromises; paralyzed or uncertain in the face of the great moral issues of our time (nuclear arms, economic and social injustice in this society, sexism, racism, hunger and so on) or do we fear an enlightened younger generation which rejects us as compromised?

Perhaps the flaccidity of formal character education in colleges is the result of faculty character unraveling. Clearly, however, adolescence and young adulthood are “prime times” for the building of a personal epistemology by students: the values and priorities by which the young will live and order their personal and social lives. Maturation impels them to form their norms aided or unaided (i.e., in response to many random and inimical forces). Faculty, in my view, have the wisdom and the “position” to help; by listening to young people’s pain and confusion, by mentoring, by example.

Willie Sutton robbed banks because that was where the money was. Universities are where the best and the brightest of America’s youth spend 4 to 8 or more formative years. That universities “teach” or model a hierarchy of values seems irrefutable. That all of us internalize the values of the important social structures (families, schools, corporations, etc.) around us is equally apparent. Intellectual honesty (“veritas”) requires that these values be acknowledged and actively examined against the same canons of rational analysis that we require students to apply and hone vis a vis the formal academic curriculum. To reiterate an earlier point, our young people seek to know the right, the good, the beautiful as well as the true and they search in the worst of times. Times in which two-thirds of the world’s children are hungry; six percent only of the Pentagon’s contracts are competitively bid and England’s best and brightest, the Oxford Debating Union, resolve that there are no moral differences between the foreign policies of the United States and the Soviet Union. Against such moral dilemmas an education which seeks truth but smuggles the right and the good is either corrupt or deformed. A higher education which pursues the true, the right and the good wherever they lead would seem false neither to its students or itself.
Character Defined:

The Sierra Project defined “character” generally as the college student’s moral reasoning and his or her self knowledge. The definition actually spread to more than this. Understanding what is the right, fair or good thing to do and then doing these things, and acting consistently were seen as the moral component of character. “Ego,” the young person’s understanding of him/herself and his/her social world was the second broad component of character. Why ego was included in the definition is not entirely clear. Basically, it seems because Loevinger has applied Piagetian concepts of stage and sequence to the study of character development: “Our discussion of ego development includes some topics previously discussed under moral development: socialization, character structure and even cognitive development” (Loevinger, 1976, p. 4). Whiteley relies heavily on Loevinger’s “central claim ... that many diverse aspects of thought, interpersonal relations, impulse control and character grow at once, in some more or less coherent way” (Loevinger, 1976, p. ix). By considering moral actions and personal maturity, Whiteley and his colleagues went well beyond an equation of character as the emergence of more comprehensive moral reasoning. The reach was for a more wholistic conception. “Character” of freshmen in the Sierra Project was made up in about equal parts of the complexity of their moral reasoning, whether their actions were consonant, how they defined themselves as persons and what their concepts of society were.

This was a definition governed in large measure by common sense, ordering concepts from cognitive developmental psychology and, in particular, what could be measured: i.e. the availability of practical tests of moral and ego development. To a considerable degree, psychological thought and tools, the available measures, in fact defined character at the empirical level. One cannot but be reminded of the statement that “intelligence is what psychologists measure as intelligence.” At another practical level, character in these young people was sought for, and promoted educationally, in their thinking about right and wrong; in the degree that they articulated a sense of social connection to their fellow students, in the amount of empathy and justice they evidenced and in the extent to which they could assert personal rights without infringing on the rights of peers. Clearly the Sierra Project was much influenced by Kohlberg’s view that morality is rooted in one’s thinking about right and wrong, one’s understanding of justice in individual and social relations.

I am impressed that Whiteley struggled with the thorny task of defining character. The governing constructs are set out unpretentiously. Whiteley makes no claim to have cut the Gordian knot of character’s definition. Similarly, the project was not paralyzed by the philosophical, psychological and empirical crevasses that radiate everywhere on the face of character. Extraordinary care was given to research design and to measurement. There were, not surprisingly, anomalies. Actual study of whether Sierra students acted as they said they should do was deferred to the study of their lives after graduation. How and if these young people connect their personal lives to a formal morality; whether morality is a very private competence drowned out by a secular, “amoral” tide in the larger society are “eternal” theoretical questions. Sierra’s answers, at their best, are for now. But they are crafted with a profound and scholarly respect for the psychological and measurement
complexities inherent in the concept of character. Whatever Sierra was, it was not a Philistine nor a “pop” psychology.

It is one thing to define character in college students. That act, per se, probably leaves most normative philosophers demanding equal time. To translate such definitions of character into commensurately complex educational practices is an act of greater temerity, of exceptional venturesomeness. To further character in the busy secular, scientific technological market place of a major university adds to the burden. That early educational practices may only partially represent a fuller vision of character education should surprise no one - author or reader. Indeed, Volume Two of Character Development in College Students is a rich Michelin guide to character education practice in the college years. Its enduring legacy is a most detailed exposition and analysis of many practical ways to promote character among college students.

The Aims of the Sierra Curriculum: “On Leaping Tall Buildings In A Single Bound”

Moral education in American public schools during the 1970’s was done primarily by the classroom discussion of moral dilemmas embedded in the academic curriculum. American history, literature, biology, health and so on are subject matters replete with moral issues: slavery, the Nuremberg trials, the massacre at Kent State, Andersonville, “Letter From The Birmingham Jail,” dioxin, “acid rain” are but a few of the examples. Teachers in many public schools were taught how to highlight such issues within their discipline and to conduct formal classroom discussions of them. The objective was to encourage children and young adults to think more deeply and ethically about the issues of right and wrong, good and bad, and the rights and obligations so raised. The results were encouraging: the moral thinking of many students became more mature from such instruction.

A second emphasis in public school moral education in the 1970’s was the discussion by students of everyday or “real” moral issues occurring in the life of the classroom or the school. Here the effort was to have students and faculty participate in the actual governance and adjudication of “their” special institution. Again, the use of the school as a natural laboratory for political, social, and moral education yielded some encouraging evidence as to its effects in promoting students’ character development.

Although broadly influenced by this parallel movement in the public schools, the Sierra Project did not, by the large, include the systematic formal discussion of either abstract moral dilemmas nor those naturally occurring in the residence. This happened for several reasons. There was no psychologist associated with the project who had made moral development his/her principal theoretical focus. (That would be true in most colleges, incidentally). Nor was there a normative philosopher or ethicist aboard. Almost all the Sierra students were at a very similar stage in their moral reasoning and, therefore, it was difficult for them to “bootstrap” themselves. The student staff were reluctant to identify the moral issues which arose naturally. The project leadership saw the necessity for sequenced moral discussions but felt such to be beyond the scope of the project. Hindsight might suggest that was an opportunity lost.
Moreover, the Sierra Project had multiple and very ambitious goals for its students, the problem of leaping tall buildings in a single bound. These included: “to help the freshmen make the transition to young adulthood, to be responsible for themselves ... to take a more active role in their education and their lives, to shift from egocentrism to awareness of others and to become aware of cultural and social issues. We were concerned with their moral, ego and character development and with fostering a sense of community amongst them.” One may question (as Whiteley does whimsically) whether goals this broad make any sense. Conversely one may ask whether an education which does not respond comprehensively to the life demands of freshmen can add meaning to the difficult psychological and social transformations being experienced. One wonders whether the Sierra team, in retrospect, would pursue more singular, developmental goals; whether in developmental education we need to learn to walk before we run.

The immediate point is that the Sierra curriculum went much beyond the promotion of moral reasoning. Yet one of the principal educational means to promote character, as the project operationally defined it, was not used. Here I refer to the formal discussion of ethical issues in the academic disciplines of the undergraduate curriculum. That omission, understandable as it was, put added burdens on the formal Sierra course and on the residence life to carry the day for character. It is also important to note a related bind. Whether Sierra was successful in promoting character was to be measured by an instrument very responsive to the formal, structural properties of moral reasoning and their exercise.

The Sierra staff “tried to enhance the moral atmosphere of (the residence) through our efforts at community building ... and at bringing moral/conflict issues before the group rather than covering them up. Examples of the latter are stealing, racial conflicts and roommate conflicts. Also the live-in student staff tried to highlight issues as they occurred; to aid students in resolving them.” It is not easy for the reader to ascertain how systematically this was done. Two impressions: first, it was done less than Whiteley believes; second, that the hidden moral curriculum, everyday life in Sierra hall and the “peer culture,” largely worked their will (as probably they always do in significant degree). A case study in Portraits in Character (Lee and Whiteley, in preparation), for example, very courageously reports how several students, caught smoking “dope,” blackmailed the staff by threatening to withdraw from the research project and take other Sierrans with them. A further possibility is that many of the Sierra Project’s effects on the freshmen were as attributable to this hidden curriculum as to the Sierra course proper.

In a project with as many objectives and activities as this one, identifying cause and effects is a most complex matter. But a 24-hour residential community in which all subjects break bread together, and live together was a curriculum designer’s dream nonetheless. With such an extraordinary complex interaction of people and experiences to manage and understand, missed opportunities and so on may be the obverse side of all this. Yet, as we learn from initiatives such as Sierra, such 24-hour communities may yield a rich harvest of human growth.
Taking the measure of the man and the woman:

It is hard to be critical of a project so honest about its gaffes. It is not hard to learn from it, however. And that is the great contribution of this volume. Sierra underscores that a first premise of education for character development is to know how mature, morally, one’s students are. Here the writer bears a direct responsibility. At the inception of the project, I had suggested to Whiteley that Sierra would be the first character education project in a position to promote the transition to what Kohlberg had termed post conventional moral thinking. Along with other so-called “experts” in the field, I assumed that late adolescence/early adulthood was the time when that transition would be happening normally. Thus Sierra aimed its initial curricula at a moral stage 4 to study stage 5 transition. Much to my embarrassment, the Sierra Project staff found themselves confronted with a population of very conventional, stage 3 moral thinkers. They were still prototypical high schoolers.

To the degree that the Sierra curriculum incorporated, or presumed thinking about intellectual or ideological themes relatively abstract to 18 year old freshmen (for example, Module 2: democratic decision making; Module 3: conflict resolution in society), to that extent a meeting of the minds would be difficult. Again and again in the discussion of the Sierra curriculum, it is reported how the thinking of the freshmen was to prove a stumbling block to the aspirations of the investigators: “This ease with the concrete and difficulty with the abstract, or theoretical was to re-occur in every module.” “Again and again when asked for abstractions (e.g., ‘How were decisions made in your Region?’) they would reply with concrete details (’We decided to get money and travel passes for everyone’).” “Most of our freshmen often tried to avoid cognitive and interpersonal conflict. They wanted to ‘be nice’. At their level for moral and ego development, there was a tendency to believe there was always a ‘right’ answer in any situation or dilemma; having conflict of any type was confusing and upsetting to them.” “Freshmen as a group are quite opinionated and tend to have a dualistic level of cognitive complexity.” And so on.

While Sierra did not test for the freshmen’s cognitive development, in Piagetian terms, it is likely that less than half of American high school graduates are capable of fully abstract thought. The authors’ repeated references to the concreteness of the Sierra students raises again the question of how many of these students were ready for the intellectual demands: for abstraction, hypothetical-deduction thinking; for many of the basic instructional concepts: “conflict resolution,” “just” or “democratic community” central to the course and so on. But in theory we would want to expose students to thinking and behaving just beyond their present understanding, in what Vygotski calls their “zone of next development.” To do that with the range of objectives of the Sierra Project would be an extraordinarily sophisticated task. But knowing where Freshmen are in their present thinking and behavior is a sine qua non.

The Sierra Curriculum in Practice:

The formal Sierra curriculum consisted of 10 modules taught in the fall, winter and spring quarters; the journal which each student kept; and the community service opportunity for
those who chose to participate. The overall rationale for the particular modules/experiences is not explicitly stated in terms of current developmental theories. For example, Erikson contends that Sierra freshmen are pre-occupied with identity or epistemological issues: Who am I? What will I be when I grow up? By what values will I live? The forming of intimate, caring relationships with others might be a further pre-occupation, Levinson believes Sierrans face two psychosocial tasks: to terminate adolescence and begin early adulthood. Further they are in the earliest phase of that transition: “A young man needs about 15 years to emerge from adolescence, find his place in adult society and commit himself to a more stable life” (Levinson, 1978, p. 71). Separating from one’s family and “breaking up that old gang of mine" are but two of the painful changes facing the Sierra cohort. My point is that a closely reasoned linkage between one or more developmental theories of late adolescence and the curriculum is not included. Perhaps it may appear in later volumes or as a retrospective. Certainly it would be an invaluable contribution to those building subsequent character education curricula in college.

Much collective time and thought was given by the Sierra staff to the development of the several modules. That is as it should be in education for development. As Dewey said: “withdrawal from the hard and fast and narrow contents of the old curriculum is only the negative side of the matter. If we do not go on and go far in the positive direction of providing a body of subject matter much richer, more varied and flexible and also in truth more definitive, judged in terms of the experience of those being educated, than traditional education supplied, we shall tend to leave an educational vacuum in which anything may happen” (1968).

For the reader, Volume Two of Character Development in College Students defines Sierra’s aims in character education and describes a plethora of means for their realization. My purpose is not to review all ten modules; that is a task for others. But the rich tapestry of character education practices reported in Volume II would be profoundly disserved without some general commentary. Following the author’s lead, let me review the curriculum of the first quarter. My purpose is to draw out some, by no means all, of the curricular learnings for anyone wishing to emulate Whiteley and Associates’ pioneering work.

The aim of the first module is perfectly clear. Sierra was full of freshmen anxious about their academic success. The focus on learning and study skills (how to “survive” in your native university) was a natural one. “Adjustment” has long been a pre-occupation of counselors. The academic anxiety associated with the transition to college somewhat allayed, the project turned to “Community Building,” through democratic decision making and student planned classes, and to “Conflict Resolution in Society.”

The project, with its usual commendable honesty, reports that the students initially did not know how to act in class. The “informal atmosphere (was) a signal to relax totally, especially to stop thinking; the perfect opportunity to socialize, to see their friends and chat with them.” (With the great advantage of hindsight, it is probable that is exactly what one should expect stage 3 adolescents to do: i.e. to stop thinking about what adults wanted them to consider academically and to think about one another, to build social community as they understand it.)
Another objective of the staff was to get freshmen to take a more active role in their own education and lives. Loxley shares two very telling anecdotes. One is the comment from a freshman. “If I hear the staff mention the ‘60’s once more I think I’ll throw up!” A second reports an exchange. Staff member: “This is your class, you can (should) decide what happens here. To which a freshman replied: ‘You decide about attendance. You’re the teacher and that’s what you’re paid for, isn’t it?’ This opinion received almost unanimous (student) support.” And why wouldn’t it? The Sierra freshmen were solidly conformist, very other directed, still very dependent on influential others for the rules of the game: parents, friends, Irvine professors who lectured, gave notes, tested rigorously and so on. The autonomy espoused by the project must seem, as yet, alien, even frightening, a developmental gain won by the staff, inch by inch or year by year. Whether the freshman could be “given” autonomous choosing by this, or any curriculum, is moot. However, it may be that the Sierra approach provides the next feasible step toward autonomy.

The power of the students’ prior academic and competitive socialization to confound the character aims of the project was brought home in other ways as well. The faculty decision was “Pass/No Pass.” The freshmen, in turn, were displeased. They wanted better grades and the chance to get an ‘A’. The moral issues of academic and personal competition, win-lose, being number one and meritocracy explicit in this trivial, every-day dilemma seem to have been overlooked.

The last module of the Fall semester was “Teaching Empathy and Social Perspective Taking.” The aim was to help the Sierra students listen, understand and respond to one another. The theoretical reason for the module was that “an increase in empathy has been found to have a positive association with an increase in moral reasoning. Similarly, social perspective taking has also been found to stimulate the capacity for moral reasoning.” Understanding people whose views and values are different can create dissonance, challenge and, thereby, pace growth in one’s own thinking. The Sierra project also valued better communication and understanding as practical ends in themselves with friends and family. Whiteley argued their special relevance for college freshmen, who are frequently self-absorbed and ego-centric. Nor was it possible to imagine a Sierra “community” without the presence of such capabilities.

Yet Sierra devoted six formal classes only to these capacities. That is somewhat puzzling in light of several comments the authors made. First, “Being a superb under stonder ... is extremely difficult, may be impossible without years of practice.” Second, “Perhaps nowhere else during the year were we as directly persuasive about our own beliefs ... A key developmental issue (for our students) is learning to broaden this frame of reference beyond peer and immediate family groups when reasoning about choosing values and proper behavior. Our students would frequently dismiss without consideration any frame of reference or point of view of those with different beliefs, value or life-styles. Conflict with peers or immediate family members is anxiety-producing, and Sierra freshmen would go to great lengths to avoid rather than resolve conflict.” So there is no doubt of the importance given to empathy and communication by the project.

A very systematic, “micro-counseling” way of teaching empathy and communication “skills” was adopted. It included a sophisticated combination of modeling by the principal
classroom instructor (herself a clinical psychologist), direct instruction and practice, the use of audio and video tapes in coaching students and so on. The findings of this module are interesting. Sierra students uniformly were unempathetic to one another in their first attempts, yet thought they were doing fine. Such courses have often found the phenomena of advice giving, interrupting, not listening, moralizing and projecting one’s own solutions or difficulties onto the other person. In the staffs view, “few students did anything resembling empathy or social perspective taking (at first) although most wanted to be helpful and supportive.” In a nutshell, Sierrans (and probably most young people) communicate like ships that pass in the night.

By the end of the module, 90 percent of the students said their listening skills had improved. What the empirical data are on this point have not yet been presented. But there is evidence from analogous, if longer, courses with high school students that such skills can be taught. The staff felt less success in persuading the students of Albert Ellis’ view that how we think about painful, difficult or confusing events determines our actual feelings, that we can control, rationally or stoically, our feeling. “For at least 25 per cent the concepts made no sense.” Obviously, cognition cannot always control or modulate emotion, especially when abstract thinking is still very new or tenuous, experience is limited and the emotions are very strong, as is often the case in adolescence.

Having been associated with some of the first attempts to teach counseling to adolescents, one or two reflections may be pertinent. The objectives of doing so have changed very little. Counseling psychologists are teaching, “giving away” as part of the general social education of young people, what they as a profession, have learned about the subtleties of communicating with people who are confused or in pain. The link between enhancing empathy and moral reasoning is now much clearer. The method of teaching has become far more direct, systematic, indeed behavioral than was the case in the earlier high school peer counseling programs. I think some opportunities to make personal meaning may have been sacrificed to efficiency in teaching skills. Further, whether counseling is a generalizable model of “ideal” human communication merits careful re-examination.

The Sierra students as quoted by Loxley and Whiteley sound like they desperately need these skills. (“Parent Effectiveness,” “Teacher Effectiveness,” “Executive Effectiveness” programs, all of which incorporate similar curricula, suggest that adolescent miscommunication foreshadows much adult “deafness” and “dumbness.”) Yet many of the Sierra students did not understand or take to the experience. The developmental status of those students who especially benefitted as over against those who did not is worth examining. There is some suggestion that empathy/listening skills training may be especially pertinent for adolescents moving from pre-conventional moral reasoning to stage 3 thinking but not so for students already there.

Nonetheless empathy, being heard and understood, is a rare and, I believe, precious experience in life. Knowing how and when to offer it (and not to do so) is a human capacity with great power for the general good. Part of wisdom (is that part of character?) is to know what is good and valuable between people and to act accordingly. Eighteen year olds have more excuses than most of us if they do not understand the power and potential of such competencies.
The Benefits of Hindsight:

Several general observations about the formal Sierra curriculum may be pertinent to those considering replication efforts. First, the curriculum was developed and taught by a team: a professor, a resident assistant in Sierra, six student staff members who lived in the residence hall and assorted others. In my own experience, a curriculum planned by a committee becomes, to some degree, a conceptual bouillabaisse. But there are countervailing benefits. The Sierra team, for example underscored a powerful point about character education made by Erikson: “There is also an age specific ethical capacity in older youth that we should learn to foster. That we, instead, consistently neglect this ethical potential and, in fact, deny it with the moralistic reaction that we traditionally employ toward and against youth (anti-institutional, hedonistic, desacrilizing) is probably resented much more by young people than our dutiful attempts to keep them in order by prohibition” (Erikson, 1967, p. 870).

Sierra to its credit, gave slightly older college students a major responsibility in the character education of freshmen. “Six members of the student staff and the Resident Assistant were our front line teachers; living in the residence hall, they interacted as more than peers and less than formal instructors.” Had there been a significant number of seniors living as staff in Sierra, this mentoring effect probably would have been even greater. Yet the powerful influence these older students, as people presumably at the next stage of experience and possibly development, had on the freshmen seems clear. Further is the stimulus to their own character development which being front line teachers may have yielded.

It is also interesting to note what kind of curriculum and teaching emerges when psychologists turn to education to realize their aims. Whiteley acknowledges that teaching character and building a sense of community are not the province of psychology any more than other disciplines. Further, Sierra would have been different if planned and implemented from another disciplinary perspective. That the two principal authors of the Sierra curriculum were counseling/clinical psychologists, therefore, must be figured in any assessment. Loxley and Whiteley, as professional psychologists, came to their task with less subject matter pre-occupation than had they been in ethics, moral philosophy or the law. Rather, their experience with students’ pain and confusion in the adjustment to college probably caused them to see the person as the critical or “hard” factor in higher education, with academic discipline the “soft” factor. (In virtually every other class attended by the Sierrans these priorities most assuredly would be reversed.)

Clearly the authors came to the Sierra project with values: character, community, the Dewey view that students and their all-around development come first; that an academic response to the non-academic aspects of coming of age: to the person becoming the physicist, is as important, or more so, than his/her knowledge of physics. The authors also drew on very diverse forms of “psychological education.” A long disquisition on psychological education is not warranted here. Suffice it to say that the reference is to systematic education, including curriculum, teaching and active experiences designed to promote broad human competencies: cognition, moral reasoning, personal development, and so on.
The Sierra curriculum is the first organized to further character development in college freshmen. The point is that there are first and second generation, initial and more comprehensive curricula. The great value of any generation of curriculum is what may be learned from them about promoting human competencies more effectively. That is the spirit in which Volume II, and this foreword, are written. In the most literal sense, the authors are explorers in an area, the definition and education of character, for which apart from the teaching of ethics, the preaching of the good book or the Talmud, the modeling of Mr. Chips, the Peace Corps or the Marine Corps R.O.T.C., colleges are without answers.

A further reflection comes with the professional territory of the authors and the locale of the college. It might be tempting to make too much of the fact that the project, and its students, had their roots in southern California, with its traditions of encounter groups and a rainbow-like proliferation and popularization of psychologies applied to the human condition. Behavioral psychology (Jacobsonian deep muscle relaxation); desensitization to test anxiety; non-verbal behavior (“Inane topic exercises”); elaborate role playing (SIMSOC) all figure prominently in the curriculum.

Sierra used a mindboggling variety of psychological experiences with its students. Yet woven throughout what might uncharitably seem like a Woody Allen satire of “life adjustment at U.C.I.” is a much older, more conservative concern: by what norms youths will live their personal and social lives, and the concern of the elders for the moral character of the young.

**On Doing What We Say:**

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I want to illustrate again how attentive one must be to the opportunities presented by the hidden curriculum in such efforts at character education: Let me cite several examples. Early in the fall quarter, the Sierra students and staff went on a retreat to a conference center in the California mountains. The formal curriculum was to be Module 3: “Conflict Resolution in Society.” The aim was to promote understanding of conflict resolution and of society building in general. The unanticipated learnings were potentially rich ones. A first was that several men ducked clean-up and cooking duties. “One student said proudly that his mother had always done everything for him and no one had ever expected him to do any kitchen or clean-up work. At this point in the year students did not confront each other about any issues like this.” A second issue was the unfamiliarity and fear that a camping experience provoked in some Sierrans, especially blacks. “For some, the trees, insects, darkness, cold and somewhat primitive conditions ... ranged from unpleasant to frightening ... (these students suggested that, in future, we describe the conditions in detail before the trip). Many of the Anglo student staff members thought this attitude was ‘stupid’.”

A third opportunity was the failure of the student staff members to confront Sierrans observed stealing T-shirts and other items from the camp storehouse. The staff members were divided by this real moral dilemma. “The student staff had been afraid to confront the (freshmen) directly during the incident ... (they) saw themselves as students and peers ... And they thought that informing the instructor and asking her to confront the students would be like calling in a parent or ‘ratting’ on the students. As a result they did nothing at the time and
brought up the issue at the next staff meeting. The instructor believed each individual who had stolen should be confronted directly, asked to discuss the theft and to return the items. Most of the (student) staff disagreed and were unwilling to tell the instructor who the students were.” The compromise was a class to present the issue of stealing. And the class was imaginatively done. But the opportunity for the Sierra community to confront a real moral issue in its own life was missed. As a final illustration of how the hidden curriculum of Sierra worked its will on the formal curriculum, there is the authors’ acknowledgment that “most of the community building came from going on the retreat together, not from playing a game.” Further, SIMSOC built community rather than understanding of notions of conflict resolution or of society in general. Again my point is not that such contradictions between what curriculum planners say and do can be avoided. Rather, they come with the territory. The craft of curriculum and teaching is increasingly to recognize and capitalize on such contradictions and serendipities. The character of character education is forged in how consistently they are acknowledged and resolved.

A Summary:

I must desist from further detailed commentary on the Sierra curriculum lest my role in writing a foreword become more hopelessly confused with that of the reviewers of this book. One point in transition to a more general conclusion, it should be palpably clear that Volume II is a very detailed book about the practices of character education in college. The volume is richly replete with curricular and teaching details. Everything the reader might want to know about how character education was conducted at the University of California, Irvine is here. Clearly my attention has been much distracted by the curriculum and really only one-third of the educational practices described. For readers aspiring to replication studies, Loxley and Whiteley’s book is incredibly valuable, I believe, precisely for the richness of practice which it describes (warts and all).

Levinson, in his Seasons of a Man’s Life dismisses the first 18 years as “only a prelude” to adult life. One might add: some prelude! Similarly Levinson looks at the “early adult transition” (the developmental period of Sierra freshmen) through the lens of the whole adult life. He sees the principal tasks facing the young adult men as separating from his family or origin and forging an initial adult life structure albeit a very tentative one. Levinson, who talked to men in their 40’s, does not ascribe great importance to this young adult transition. In the long view he implies: Why bother very much about what is happening? It is all to be shaken up, undone and reconstituted several times over before 40 or 50 anyway. And success is ultimately elusive for us all.

But with Whiteley and associates, I believe there are compelling reasons to act educationally on behalf of character in the college years. Life itself requires major commitments/decisions from young people: academic or other achievement, choice of a “major,” vocation, job relationships long before they have had the experience to acquire the wisdom or the moral insight to make such choices sagely. Time and events wait for no man or woman. Nor do the problems Sierra youth face get any easier. The “Candy” and “Cody” case studies to appear as part of Portraits in Character (Lee and Whiteley, in preparation) vividly document the mindwarping, existential moral choices facing young people at Irvine. Nor is there any reason to believe these are
peculiar to fast lane living in the land of the lotus eaters, southern California. And the protagonists’ bewilderment, pain and inability to bootstrap themselves, to live with integrity either by the old or the newest norms comes through powerfully in these case studies. To remain impassive, relativistic or unavailable in the face of such anguished young people is itself a failure of character at both the personal and institutional lure. That is something, I am sure, which Whiteley and his colleagues were responding to in the Sierra project.

Conversely, as we have already observed, the souls of these young people are actively sought by many secular gods in the modern university. The idolatry of intellect is but one. The promise of ineluctable individual and human progress if young people will only follow science, technology, medicine and so on is another. So, too, corporations outside the university actively solicit brains and “management” skills on behalf of individual gain and stockholder profit. R.O.T.C.’s openly buy youth for country and war with tax-payers’ dollars. Against this secular, ostensibly “value-relative” college environment (which, in my view, is hustling all kinds of character priorities) are arrayed very few voices for deliberation, moral principle, an examination of what is right, just and good. And the voices that are raised are often pitted one against another rather than on behalf of the young (philosophers who won’t deign to talk to psychologists or educator; psychologists who insist on unconditional positive regard for every person, no matter how fascistic, racist or authoritarian their view may be; women developmentalists who argue that women’s special moral voice has been denied and who boycott the forum and so on).

In a university world, then, in which intellect seems so dominant, so sure; where the personal and social mores seem so fractured and up for grabs; where young people experience so much adult cant, moralizing, hypocrisy and flat-out seduction; where anguishing moral dilemmas are answered only by secularism, Sierra burns like a beacon in the darkness.

References


Part II

Residential Education as a Crucible for Character Development and Community

John N. Gardner
“Reflections on the First-Year Residential Experience

John M. Whiteley
“The Joys and Sorrows of Moral and Intellectual Maturation”
John N. Gardner

John N. Gardner founded the world-wide First Year Experience annual conferences in 1982 and is founder in 1986 of the National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina which have had a transformative effect on the experience of the freshman year both in the United States and around the world.

With colleague Dr. Betsy Barefoot, he founded the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education in Brevard, North Carolina as an outgrowth of the Policy Center for the First Year Experience which dated from 1999. The mission of the Institute is to partner with “higher education institutions, individual institutions, and other entities to increase institutional responsibility for improving student learning, persistence, and completion.” This initiative has received so far over $7.5 million in foundation funding.

Professor Gardner is a prolific scholar who has made a major impact on higher education with a series of influential books for two audiences: college students themselves, and professionals in higher education. Among the influential books are Your College Experience: Strategies for Success: Step by Step to College and Career Success, The Senior Year Experience: Facilitating Integration, Reflection, Closure, and Transition, and Developing and Sustaining Successful First-Year Programs.

Recognition of Professor Gardner and Dr. Barefoot with the Prestigious Ernest L. Boyer Award

Professor Gardner and Dr. Barefoot are the 2012 recipients of the prestigious Ernest L. Boyer Award from The New American Colleges and Universities. The Boyer Award honors the legacy of Ernest L. Boyer and celebrates the mission “to integrate liberal education, professional studies, and civic responsibility by drawing connections across the disciplines, between general education and the major, between faculty and students, between the classroom and campus life, between traditional education and life-long learning, and between the campus and the larger world.”

Ernest L. Boyer was a renaissance scholar and educator who helped shape American education as Chancellor of the State University of New York, as United States Commissioner of Education, and as President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Among his influential publications are High School: A Report on Secondary Education (1988), Campus Life (1990), Ready to Learn (1991), The Basic School (1995), and one of the most relevant to introducing the importance of the scholarship of John N. Gardner and Betsy Barefoot, Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate, Princeton: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1990). Boyer argued that if universities are to continue advancing forward, a new vision of scholarship is required. The reason is that basic research alone will not secure either the future of higher education or that of the country at large. He called for new forms of research including the scholarship of application--scholarship which examines the perspective of engagement.

Boyer posed the fundamental question:

How can new knowledge be applied to consequential problems?

His answer was that when theory and practice came together, then engagement in society and its institutions becomes scholarly. This scholarship of application seeks to discover how the university may assist with societal problems.

The life’s work of John N. Gardner and Betsy Barefoot may be understood as exemplary models of the scholarship of application by the university to itself--how it may accomplish more effectively the tasks assigned by society of educating the next generation of its citizens. Their story is unfolding.

In “Reflections on the First-Year Residential Experience,” Professor Gardner explores the relationship between the work of residential educators and the work of enhancing the experience of first-year college students.
Reflections on the First-Year Residential Experience
Chapter 4
John N. Gardner

As the title implies, this monograph, now in its second edition, comes as a result of a unique and continuing partnership between the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International and the National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina. We have a common objective: We wish to intentionally design experiences for the first college year that will increase student learning, satisfaction, retention, and graduation rates.

In this introduction, I would like to share with you some themes, concerns, questions, and challenges about the importance of the residential learning experience. I am persuaded, above all, that you, the readers of this monograph are playing a vital role in my favorite topic and cause in American higher education: the first-year experience. Of the over one and a half million students we house on America’s college campuses, approximately 40% are new students. Through your work, concern, and vision, you have enormous impact on the environments in which they live, study, learn, recreate, and grow.

The Importance of Residence Halls

I intend for this introduction to be a platform for me to share with you some of my perspectives on the relationship between the work of residential educators and what has become my profession—enhancing the experience of first-year college students. The first perspective I want to convey is that of respect, respect for the importance of the work you do. Residence halls are important because:

♦ For better or worse, the life-styles and behaviors therein reflect the values of the larger undergraduate culture.

♦ They are where students spend more of their time than anywhere else on a residential college campus.

♦ They represent the environmental context where many students, for the first time, live without mom and dad, with diverse people, without middle class American privacy, in what is perhaps the most intense peer group environment of their lives.

♦ They are or should be sanctuaries; that is, environments where students can retreat from the world of more stressed-out adults and reflect, make their own meaning, and find peace, solace, and companionship.

♦ They may be the first coeducational consensual living environments these young people will have experienced outside their nuclear families.
They are vital to improving the retention of first-year students. It is well
documented that students who live on campus tend to have significantly higher
persistence rates. Evidence collected at my University in 1995 has shown that on-
campus residence is the best predictor of persistence, and that when combined with
taking a freshman seminar, persistence is double that of students who live off
campus and do not take the freshman seminar.

They provide captive audiences for important student affairs programming.

They are the first collegiate environments of significant freedom.

New student satisfaction correlates with their satisfaction with their initial living
experience.

Some of the relationships that form in the residence halls last for the balance of the
students’ lives.

For better or worse, the kind of friendships which develop informally in the college
peer group culture in residence halls encourage either success or failure because we
tend to become like the people with whom we live.

My First Year Of College

It is impossible for me to write about my favorite subject, The First-Year Experience,
without thinking in terms of my own first college year. But what about yours? What do you
remember about that critical year? Did you live in a residence hall? Was your hall the worst
residence facility on the campus as was mine at Marietta College–Douglas Putnam Hall, a
former chair factory? Did you have a housemother? Were your college and its officials
acting in loco parentis? Were there separate standards for men and women in terms of
conduct, visitation, or curfews? If so, what meaning did you make of that? Did those
separate standards contribute to sexist assumptions that you may have carried on to the
present? Were your residence halls racially integrated? Mine were not in 1961, three years
before the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

Let me convert this into a personal odyssey for you as well as for me. Do you recall in what
year you first went to college? Who was President of the United States? Reflect a moment
that today’s traditional-aged students are aware of only three presidents: Reagan, Bush,
and Clinton. In the first few weeks and months of college, what were your major
developmental tasks? Were they academic or nonacademic? Do you remember anything
you were asked to read or any of the professors who asked you to do this reading? I recall
the professors who asked me to read Erich Fromm’s Escape from Freedom, Ralph Waldo
Emerson’s Self Reliance, and David Riesman’s The Lonely Crowd.

Suppose you could go back now and write a story for your hometown newspaper after your
first semester in college. What would the headline be? Mine would be, "Homesick John
Gardner Returns to Family with a 1.6 GPR on Academic Probation." In my first college
semester I was totally unclear as to the purpose of college. I found my professors boring.
My advisor told me I was the "stupidest kid" he had ever advised. (He later became a
college president.) I took classes that I had no aptitude for, and I was more interested in doing what my father wanted me to do than what I might have wanted to do. I had no study habits. I was lonely and homesick. I had no student personnel professionals to look after me—just a former math professor who was the infamous "Dean of Men." The president and others made predictions of my failure. I struggled to cope with the premature departure of my homesick roommate, the heavy drinking of a second roommate, and a total lack of privacy. I did not know how to do my laundry, and my peer group included some real losers.

**Today's First-Year Students**

How is the first year of college for the class of 2,000 different on your campus from the way you and I lived it—15, 25, or 35 years ago? How have the students themselves changed, and what new challenges do they present to higher education institutions? First-year students are more anxious than upperclass peers, and the following factors account for some of their anxiety:

- They are living in an era of increasing pessimism coupled with unprecedented materialism and world economic restructuring and corporate "downsizing."
- They are asking basic questions about their ability to afford a home or manage lives of early debt.
- They are asking whether they will be able to have a stable family and healthy children.
- They are living in an era when sex can kill them.
- They are often feeling pressure from parents to choose practical majors they may not want.
- They are living in a culture that places tremendous emphasis on circumstances over which many of them have no control such as their skin color, body size, or sexual orientation.

I hope that you have an intellectually intimate context, such as a first-year student seminar, from which to observe and talk to the new students on your campus. That is why I have taught such a seminar nearly every fall semester for the past 25 years. I realize that some of you may not have such an opportunity, and this leads me to wonder and question what you really know about the quality of the first-year experience, both in and out of the classroom, and especially in the residence halls. How has your institution changed its policies and programs in response to the needs of new students? Is there campus resistance to such change, and what factors perpetuate this resistance? Your campus, as mine, undoubtedly has its own story to tell in response to these questions. And your story, of course, must center on the residence hall experience.
Residence Halls Today

The current state of residence halls on college campuses is a reflection of the evolution of American higher education. The largest percentage of residence halls were built in the 1960s, when they were cheap to build on low-interest federal loans. Now, they are very expensive to maintain and repair. Before World War II, many faculty actually lived in the residence halls on many campuses. Since that time, of course, the value system of the American professoriate has changed dramatically, and faculty members have given up many of the functions they formerly pursued when they literally lived over the store.

Since the turn of the century, an entirely new profession, the field of student affairs, has evolved and has undertaken many duties formerly performed by faculty. Student affairs professionals now assume the primary responsibilities for counseling, disciplining, sponsoring of student activities, as well as supervising and administering residence halls.

In more recent years, we have witnessed the integration of residence halls by race and gender, the latter paralleling the sexual liberation of students and society at large. The increasing violence and vandalism in American society at large has, of course, found its way into residence halls along with other manifestations of disrespect for personal property and the rights of others. And finally, the end of expansion in American higher education and resulting fiscal pressures have caused residence halls (and you who administer them) to be viewed as campus revenue generators.

Enhancing the First-Year Experience

In my 29 years as faculty member, university administrator, and advocate for first-year students, I have learned a great deal about what works in American higher education to enhance the first critical college year. I would like to share these observations with you.

♦ Focusing on first-year students works. Both the students themselves and the institution can be profoundly changed. Many institutions have become much more student-centered, and retention has been enhanced, often in the most unlikely populations. Today’s students are making more use of student services, seeking more assistance from advisors, and reporting more satisfaction with the total college experience.

♦ Presidents can make a difference. They can change the lives of everyone in their institutions by making first-year students a priority, as I learned when my president started University 101 back in 1972 and invited me to join it. You have got to get your president into the residence halls more often.

♦ Change is possible, but it rarely succeeds when mandated. While change can be encouraged and facilitated from the top, it works best when initiated from the ranks of the faculty and student affairs staff. I recommend that institutions have a task force to evaluate the first-year experience.
There is a great deal of altruism in the higher education professions, and we have great power to influence student development. We just need to own that power and use it intentionally to develop our citizens' lives to their full potential.

Intentional faculty development programs can improve the quality of teaching. Faculty can be taught teaching skills they didn’t learn in graduate school.

Faculty, student affairs professionals, and students benefit when partnerships are created and maintained. This theme of partnership is the basis for the Freshman Year Experience conferences.

Students need "basic training" for college. As Ernest Boyer (1987) said in College: The Undergraduate Experience in America, "We further propose that all colleges offer a short term credit course for new students entitled "The College: Its Values and Traditions."" Residence halls are ideal contexts for such basic training.

Colleges should celebrate the arrival of first-year students in order to develop among students a sense of cohesiveness, community, and importance within the institution. Such celebrations should not include hazing, beanie, and "rat week" such as I experienced at Marietta College. Again, residence halls are ideal focal points for positive celebration.

Selection of those individuals who greet and work with new students is critical. Particular attention should be given to choosing residence hall staff who are exemplary role models, who are well trained, who are appropriately rewarded, and who want to work with first-year students.

Relationships between entering college students and employees of the institution are critical and, as much as possible, should not be left to chance. Retention research clearly demonstrates that students who have a significant relationship with at least one employee of the institution are more likely to persist and graduate. My own first-year students, in their papers and journals, tell me that many of these significant others are residence hall staff.

"First-year student success" is an ever broadening concept which must include not only academics but also a more holistic approach focusing on success relative to relationships, identity development, career decision making, wellness, and understanding the various purposes of a college education so as to develop a more meaningful philosophy of life.

Institutions have learned to do things by design rather than to rely on serendipity. As the great American philosopher of education, John Dewey, wrote in 1916, "We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference" (p.22).

Not all new students are the same. There are many distinct subpopulations with distinct needs.
There are no quick fixes for campus problems. Instead, there are a number of slow fixes.

Institutions can develop a solid first-year experience without an orientation seminar which has been the most widely implemented enhancement program for first year students. They also can develop an enhanced FYE with a freshman seminar.

It takes more than curriculum change to change new students. We also have to be more intrusive in their living environments. After all, that’s where students spend about 85% of their time.

We must recognize the importance of checking out our assumptions about new students in a small group context. These students always know their experience better than we do.

We must realize that new students leave college for all kinds of reasons that are preventable. We have been tolerating attrition that we should not have tolerated because of our academic social Darwinian assumptions.

Helping first-year students is not primarily a movement of younger administrators. The primary change agent is often a senior faculty member assisted by a senior student personnel administrator, supported by a senior academic administrator.

The graduate school model that equates status with one's distance from new students has to be unlearned. Caring for them need not be incompatible with the achievement of status.

Some of the most unlikely candidates for student success do, in fact, succeed.

There is an advocate for first-year students on every campus, as we have discovered in the annual national "freshman advocate" award campaigns sponsored by the National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience and Students in Transition and Houghton Mifflin. Many such advocates are found in residence halls.

Lack of money is no excuse. Institutions can do anything they want to do for new students if they make them a priority.

There are still not enough rewards for faculty and staff who work with new students. The reward system has run amuck over the past 50 years. We are pressured to emulate the graduate school model, but few of us are equipped to deliver it. This results in frustrated faculty and poorly served students.

Caring for first-year students is a key to building institutional community because such efforts force us outside the boundaries of our own turf. The willingness to become involved then becomes the litmus test for true concern for all students and is far preferable to student bashing.

Some of the most important reforms in the first-year experience have been in the form of continuing/extended orientation, developing first-year student seminars,
enhancing academic advising—all of these can be, and many are, carried out in the residence hall context.

**Future Needs For The Residential First Year**

A theme for this set of reflections could be, "We've come a long way." We certainly have, since my days in the "dormitories" in the 1960s. But we have a long way to go. What do we need to do to fulfill the inherent potential for holistic student development within the context of the residential first-year experience?

♦ Within the residence life profession, we need to make the experience of first-year students a top priority.

♦ We need a better integration of academic life into the residence hall experience. We should invite more faculty to come into the residence halls to live, teach, advise, eat, and whatever else we can think of that is socially legitimate. We need more academic advising, tutoring, counseling, library satellites, and computing facilities within residence halls. (See Chapter 5; see also in the references T. Smith's *Gateways: Residential Colleges and The Freshman Year Experience.*)

♦ We need to invest more of the monies residence halls generate back into those halls. For too long some of us have been cash cows for our institutions. The result of not maintaining and refurbishing halls is the "College Can be Killing" syndrome, as documented by a 1978 television program of the same title produced by the University of Illinois. This syndrome is caused by unintentionally depressing institutional living ambiences that contribute to the rise in student suicides.

♦ We need to provide more incentives for adults to live in the halls, especially families, to create a greater sense of community, family, and multigenerational living in the halls.

♦ We need to make staff jobs in residence halls more attractive for outstanding undergraduates. The basic problem here is that, as in any organization, those who live over or in the store have lower status. Also, because new students have the lowest status conferred upon them, many of you must distance yourselves from them in order to achieve upward mobility in your own profession. So we often use the youngest, least educated, poorest paid staff to work with first-year students. In contrast, working with these students in the residence halls should be a position of distinction and status. In first-year halls, the challenges are greatest, hours are longest, and problems such as vandalism and alcohol abuse the most rampant. This is why the best residence hall staff are needed in these halls.

♦ Because we know that persistence is greater for students who live on campus, we need to provide more scholarships to assure that opportunity is less a function of socioeconomic status.
♦ We need to provide more residence halls for single mothers and their children such as those at Texas Woman's University, Goddard College, and Chatham College (Mangan, 1990).

♦ We need more assessment, both qualitative and quantitative, of the impact of the residence hall experience and better dissemination of findings.

♦ We need to allow students to plan, organize, and control their own activities in the residence halls as much as possible. This will respond to the criticism of Michael Moffatt (1989) in his book *Coming of Age in New Jersey*.

♦ Residence hall staff need to see themselves as agents of change who are primary messengers of the realities of student life to those in authority within the institution.

♦ We need to offer the option of grouping students in the halls by academic interest; for example, in mathematics and science as in Douglas College at Rutgers.

♦ There should be programming in every residence hall in America on the following key issues of vital interest to the future of our democracy:

◊ The rising tide of racism. We must promote respect and appreciation for diversity to include multiculturalism and gender differences. For example, the University of California, Berkeley, an institution at which there is no ethnic majority, sponsors experiential residential hall workshops to help students increase their own cultural sensitivity and to make them aware of the negative effects of stereotyping.

◊ The epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases which have now replaced alcohol and drug addiction as the number one public health enemy on the American college campus. At the University of South Carolina, data from our Student Health Center would suggest that up to 80% of the traditional-aged students are sexually active; and of these, we estimate that 8-12% have some form of sexually transmitted disease.

◊ The problem of campus alcoholism and binge drinking. In the absence of sufficient preventive health education programs and pervasive peer pressure, the residence halls are breeding grounds for a future generation of alcoholics. We must use the halls as the context to educate students for responsible alcohol consumption.

◊ Leadership. The country craves it, this elusive "L" factor. Every four years the press, the politicians, and the voters seek to identify leaders. America's corporations are hungry for leadership as they push the panic button about the decline in quality of workers who will enter the work force in the 1990s. My own alma mater, Marietta College, is doing outstanding curricular and co-curricular programming on leadership.

♦ Residence halls need to be seen as the cornerstone of our efforts to generate campus community. For better or worse, the halls are mirrors of how we treat our students,
whether we leave them alone or invest time and resources in them—that is, the time of our best faculty and staff.

♦ We need to administer residence halls as if our children were going to reside in them. In what kinds of conditions would you want your child living?

♦ Increasingly, I think that we need to design residence halls around the theme of making transitions, especially the two most critical transitions in college: the transition in, as in the first college year, and the transition out, as in the senior year. We need to teach transition skills by addressing issues in those environments where we truly have the most captive audience.

♦ We need to use the residence halls as forums for students to talk to each other. Some of my own most powerful learning experiences in college came in those late night bull sessions which were facilitated, thank goodness, without television. I want to borrow a concept here from a YMCA camping experience, specifically from Camp Becket-in-the-Berkshires in Massachusetts where I worked in 1970 and where I sent my own son in 1985, 1986, and 1987. At the end of the day, in each cabin of eight campers, came the appointed hour when the campers have the most important learning experience of the day. They sit around the cabin floor in darkness with only a candle lit, and the counselor leads what is called "the cabin chat." This is an opportunity for reflection on the day's events, the sharing of feelings, accomplishments, questions, and concerns. How can you structure the equivalent of "cabin chats" in a collegiate residence hall environment?

♦ As in everything else we do in higher education, we have to decide whether we are merely going to ape the values of the culture—in this case, the extraordinary emphasis on materialism and creature comforts—or whether we are going to invest our attention and resources to stand for some alternative values. Towards this end, I was distressed when I read an article in The Chronicle entitled "In Buyer's Market, Colleges Turn to Posh Dorms and Fast Food to Lure Students" (Collison, 1989). The article reported that a number of institutions were developing elaborately designed, state-of-the-art residence halls with plush carpeting, microwave ovens, cable television, fast food courts with everything from hamburgers to Thai food, and even room service with delivery of food to rooms. I cannot think of anything more likely to bring down on the heads of college housing officials the charge that institutions are spending too much on expensive frills which, in turn, drive up the costs of higher education and siphon money from academic operations. When times get tight and the academic leadership looks for an ox to gore, I do not think housing officers want to give them any excuses. One critic of such practices is the former President of York College in Pennsylvania, Robert Iosue, who was quoted as saying, "We should be marketing educational quality, not trying to market materialism" (Collison, 1989, p. A39).

♦ Above all, we need to make sure that residence halls do not "go to the dogs." Some of you may be aware that, for over a decade, Eckerd College in Florida set aside two residence halls where students may live with their pets. Officials there have been
quoted as saying that they have about 40 dogs and cats and an additional 100-caged animals such as hamsters, lizards, and skunks. (The latter must be descented before coming to campus.) The rationale, according to one official, is that "if students grow up with a pet, they shouldn't have to leave it at home. It will probably be better for their emotional stability to let them bring the pet to school" (Collison, 1989, p. A2).

Approximately 15 years ago I visited a college in Nebraska where, in order to ease the homesickness encountered by a number of its rural student residents, they were allowed to bring their horses to campus, not to live in the residence halls but in an appropriate stable. All of this suggests how far we have come in responding to students' unique needs! And residence life professionals appear to be on the cutting edge of that trend.

Conclusion

I want to leave you with several question—the questions often being more important in life than the answers.

1. In your residence halls how high a priority are the experiences of first-year students?
2. What are you doing for first-year students that you are not doing for other students?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of what you are doing for first-year students?
4. How long has it been since you examined or rethought what you are doing special for first-year students?

I urge you to respond to this monograph with a renewed determination to make first-year students a greater priority—to do so in the larger context of the search for institutional community and to do so in partnership with your faculty colleagues.

Whether your first-year students stay in college, how much they learn, with whom they associate, their attitudes toward your institution, and their behavior in later years in your residence halls if they choose to continue living on campus may well be determined by what kind of a priority you make these students in the critical first year.

References


University of Illinois (Producer). (1978). *College can be killing*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Film Center.
The Joys and Sorrows of Moral and Intellectual Maturation
Chapter 5
John M. Whiteley

The title for this chapter, “The Joys and Sorrows of Moral and Intellectual Maturation,” is a line from the Doonesbury segment introduced in the introduction. It refers to the crucible for human development that is the residence hall of the first college year.

The First-Year Experience in the Residence Hall

The effects of student life in the college residence hall have been extensively studied, and the voluminous research literature contrasts commuter versus residential students and various residential populations (Astin, 1968; Astin, 1977). Of more recent vintage is the body of research literature which focuses more directly on the first-year experience in the residence hall in relation to moral reasoning.

Underpinning the curriculum was an assumption that it would be possible to challenge students more if the environment was as supportive as we could design it. This notion is derived directly from the work of Nevitt Sanford (1982) and others on the importance of a psychological sense of community (Whiteley & Associates, 1982).

Within the Sierra Project the effort to create a psychological sense of community took several forms. In staffing the residence hall, a sophomore trained in empathy skills and community-building skills was assigned to each suite of eight new students (Whiteley & Associates, 1982). In the formal academic class, there were many exercises designed to promote a sense of community (Loxley & Whiteley, 1986). Organized extracurricular experiences were selected in large part because of their contribution to the creation of community.

Building on a sense of community, the first-year residence hall was the location for a four-unit class offered each fall, winter, and spring quarter of the academic year. It was required for all residents of the hall, and most instruction occurred there. Students received four "pass/no pass" units of graduation credit with full-time enrollment considered to be 16 units.

Key Components of the First-Year Experience

The key components of the first-year experience in the residence hall fell into two general categories:

- The structure of the hall itself
- The content of the formal curriculum
There were six key elements of these categories:

1. The provision of 12 units of academic credit and required participation in the academic program. This feature allowed us access to a significant portion (25%) of a student’s formal academic time. This turned out to be a small enough amount that students in the humanities, social sciences, biological sciences, and physical sciences could make normal progress toward their lower division and departmental requirements toward graduation.

   Requiring informed participation for all residents assured that the structured curricular and extracurricular experiences would be a salient feature of the atmosphere of life in the residence hall. This made it possible for the basic ideas around which the Sierra experience was designed to have a more pervasive impact.

2. The presence of more mature role models in the residence hall. The provision of more mature role models was especially important because Sierra was created for only first-year students, and a dominant characteristic was a similarity of experience and point-of-view. Further, the new student population turned out to be highly conventional and quite homogeneous in psychological outlook on moral and ethical issues. While ethnically diverse, the students shared a common psychological profile of allegiance to the primary group of friends, a definition of fairness in terms of the rules and expectations of known peers, and a desire to avoid conflict wherever possible.

   The regular presence of older students and adults with a more complex outlook made a vital contribution to an educational environment intended to stimulate thinking. In each suite of eight new students there was a sophomore staff member. An upper-level student served as resident advisor and formal representative of the housing administration. The instructor for the academic class was available several times a week. And every student had to write journal entries on a regular basis which were read and commented upon by either one of the staff members identified above or by an adult member of the university community who volunteered time for the journal-reader assignment.

3. The greater responsibility for shaping their educational experience which was demanded of students. Students at the start of their first year had been accustomed to teachers who defined the content of their instructional experience and who presented subject matter in which the answers were, for the most part, clearly defined. This previous instructional experience was quite congruent with the tendency of students to think in dualistic terms of black and white and right and wrong (Perry, 1970).

   Since a clear purpose of the curriculum was to stimulate active thinking about more complex alternatives, a goal of the instructors was to motivate students toward a more personally involved approach to learning. The approach to motivating students to more active learning was multifaceted. The regular classroom exercises were intended to engage students and force them to take a stand on an issue they may not have thought about before. By the start of the spring quarter, first-year students were challenged to collaborate with each other in the preparation of actual classes.
4. **The active collaboration between faculty and staff in the planning of curricular lessons.**
There was an active collaboration between the student staff and the faculty in the planning of individual classes. What student staff contributed, especially the sophomores who lived in the residence hall, was accurate information about what had been the impact of previous lessons and what was going on in the informal discussions about the subject matter of the class.

There was also a generational gap, since the new students were 18 or 19 years old, and the professional staff were in their 30s or 40s. It was very helpful to have cross-generational dialogues about elements of the subject matter prior to presenting it in class. One reason for the consistently high student evaluations of the class is the effort which the six sophomores and the professional staff put into refinement of the curriculum.

5. **The formal research component which provided regular information about student developmental status and the effects of the curriculum.** The formal research component accomplished three goals. The **survey design** involved testing at the beginning and end of the first year, then at the end of the sophomore, junior, and senior years. A select sample was tested and re-interviewed eight to ten years after graduation.

This longitudinal survey design addressed the question of whether change occurred and the duration of those changes. The **topical design** investigated whether certain portions of the intervention produced specific changes in first-year students. Data from a variety of sources were collected before and after specific modules of the curriculum. The **intensive design** evaluated individual variation in response to the intervention. The focus was on in-depth case studies of individual students.

A factor in the credibility of the Sierra Project has been its research base. There has been academic credit granted for the course taught in the residence hall since its inception. The contributions of the housing personnel have been subjected to regular review through both student evaluations and the topical design. The research results from the **survey** and **intensive** designs have become part of the professional literature and, therefore, subject to regular peer review and scholarly commentary.

6. **The provision of specific aspects of the formal curriculum.** The formal Sierra curriculum consisted of **ten separate modules** as follows:

- Survival Skills. What first-year students need to know that most seniors already do: how to organize their time, study effectively, and prepare for and take examinations.

- Community Building. Helping students work together to create an atmosphere of openness, trust, and group support in an environment characterized by conflict resolution through democratic decision making.

- Conflict Resolution in Society. Participation in a commercially available simulation game in which students are given vaguely structured roles and allowed to form their own society. Emphasis is placed on survival issues, personal goals, problems of power and authority, and what type of society provides the most good for the most people. Principles of fairness and justice as well as conflict resolution skills are involved throughout the game.
Empathy and Social Perspective-Taking. Basic listening and communication skills for the development of empathy-defined as the ability to understand the point of view of an other and of the ability to communicate that understanding.

Socialization. What are people like now? How did they come to be that way? Values and life-styles were examined as salient factors and pressures in the socialization process.

Sex-Role Choices. How socialization by gender affects current values, behaviors, and interests.

Race Roles. How race relates to socialization. Examines stereotyping, racial values and attitudes, and cross-cultural relationships.

Assertion Training. Enhances relationships by helping students learn to identify the personal rights involved in a conflict situation and to resolve that situation, assuring their own legitimate rights without violating others’ rights.

Life and Career Planning. Students explore decision making. This module helps students in the decision-making process by exposing them to a variety of life and career options.

Community Service. Provides the opportunity for students to work with people with real problems in a natural setting; allowing them to apply the skills they have been learning in Sierra in a community setting.

For readers interested in learning more about each of the modules, Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 of Loxley and Whiteley (1986) provide a general background and indicate what was offered on a weekly basis in the residence hall.

There were four general goals for offering the curriculum. They were:

- To facilitate the transition from high school to college life;
- To stimulate psychological development from late adolescence to early adulthood, particularly in the dimension of character;
- To foster a consideration of future lifestyle choices and career decisions; and
- To challenge learners to apply their educational experiences to problems in the broader community through community services.

Each element of necessary classroom preparation was documented. The reason for this attention to detail was so that instructors and housing personnel in other colleges and universities could replicate portions of our work and adapt it to the special circumstances of their institutions.

Feedback from the student staff and the new students was an important factor in modifying the curriculum. After the first year of the curriculum intervention in 1975, information from the survey design and the intensive design convinced us to change the emphasis of weekly exercises. We found that for our specific population, we were placing too much emphasis on issues related to promoting a transition from conventional to post-conventional thinking and not enough emphasis on the moral challenges for students who
had just made a transition from pre-conventional to conventional thinking in the Kohlberg (1969) theory of moral development. This information allowed the modification of the curriculum to make it more congruent with the psychological characteristics of the particular student population at the University of California, Irvine.

After surveying the student evaluations from the *topical design*, a number of aspects of the formal curriculum were singled out by the professional staff as contributing most to student development in the area of moral maturation:

- The Assertion Training Model which developed students’ skills in identifying the rights of oneself and others and learning to resolve conflicts fairly
- The Empathy Training Module which increased students’ perceptions of how other people experience situations
- The consideration of sex roles and race roles stimulated more complex thinking about ways of relating to other people

This rethinking of previously unexamined beliefs was imbedded throughout the modules and represented a conscious effort by the faculty to focus on this aspect of human experience. This effort creates a psychological sense of community.

**New Opportunities for Housing Programs to Promote the Moral Maturity**

The Sierra Project has shown the possibility of promoting moral maturity within both residential living and academic course work. By active collaboration of housing personnel and faculty, neither the important extracurricular sense of community nor academic progress toward graduation has had to be sacrificed.

The special contributions of housing personnel are vital to the process of promoting moral maturity in college students. It is the housing staff who control roommate assignment policy and the selection, training, and supervision of residence advisors and student staff. Most individuals professionally trained in housing administration or college student personnel work have had formal instruction in program evaluation. Therefore they are able to administer properly the *survey* design and *topical* design evaluations which are so important to offering credible programs in moral education which are based in college residence halls.

Housing administrators often have assignment responsibility for some of the most attractive meeting facilities on campus. The formal Sierra class met frequently in the living room of Sierra Hall. The smaller living rooms of each of the six suites also proved to be attractive informal gathering places. Access for instructional purposes to attractive locations in the housing area of campus can be a very positive feature for both faculty and staff.

Housing personnel can make an additional vital contribution to a moral education program by informing prospective students of the opportunity. The housing office is in contact with entering students, and our experience was that they were able to explain in a timely and
effective manner what the project was about and what participation in the project would mean. In fact, with the assistance from student staff, the communications written by the Housing Office about Sierra were far more persuasive to entering students than faculty authored course descriptions.

The most intangible, but perhaps the most important, contribution made by the housing office was the creation of a psychological sense of community. The countless human transactions over everything from the reporting of lost meal tickets or roommate conflicts to feelings of loneliness or fear of failure occur in an emotional climate. That climate can be one which fosters trust, openness, and feelings of emotional security. If it is, it will contribute in an ongoing way to the creation and maintenance of a sense of community. A shared sense of valuing between housing staff and students of both educational endeavors and the struggle for personal growth also contributes to a psychological sense of community.

It is simply not possible for faculty and administration to contribute on a daily basis to the intangibles of community which are the product of the countless personal encounters of residential life. Simply stated, the housing program and its staff have a vital role to play in the implementation of programs designed to promote moral maturity.

References


