



**NEW DIRECTIONS  
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New Directions in Policy and Programs**

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THE MISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN HUMAN SERVICES FOR YOUTH

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I want to raise three points concerning the mission of higher education in human services for youth. The first point is that the greatest service or disservice in higher education provided for youth is the way it asks us to think about its purpose. There are serious current misconceptions about youth that academic institutions take special pains to examine and correct. Second, the greatest service that higher education can render to youth is through putting it in a better position to devise or enforce human services in service structures that better fit policy areas, such as youth. I will argue also that universities and colleges are not doing what they might, probably because of the way their programs are presently organized. I would suggest an organization which might better provide government and other users a structure that would overcome the effects of a partial approach to a complex policy problem. The third greatest service is to involve higher education directly in human services for youth, to stimulate and test its ideas, directly participating in community action programs. I would argue further that community action is not only important as a direct contribution to the service group, but

it can also contribute to the fundamental work of the university or college itself, and be important from the viewpoint of helping the critical part of policy making concerning decentralized decision making and resource allocation. I will not draw much on the particulars of the range of such services or on the individual problems of youth. I will focus on all-around service, such as community action.

Due to the special nature and involvement with youth, and the fact that it probably is the major service to youth, higher education should take a supportive and a protective approach toward youth. It should be an advocate. It should positively seek to create favorable conceptions and devise measures to implement.

The university should look, first of all, at the merit and validity of the conception of youth as a category as such, and especially at the impact of policy programs under persons currently defined as "youth." It is not self-evident that the best service to be done to people at certain ages is to segregate them into those categories called "youth". It is not unanimously certain that by so doing, human services and service structures emerge which, in fact, sufficiently support and protect people of those ages.

Classifying a group basically under the single group reference of age may be a measurement, but it is not necessarily enough progress. At the base, such classification creates segregation and tends to bring, in its wake, trials and tribulations. For example, classifying persons with certain ages as unavailable for employment has prevented child abuses. But, it has also segregated that group and prevented its participation in real life. I urge, therefore, that universities take a greater role in reevaluating the concept of youth itself.

We now have had experience with enough programs of sufficient scale addressed directly to youth that we should return to origins, as some researchers are starting to do. We should increase our attempts to discern the consequences for persons in this age group and organize public policy around them as a segregated group. We should begin, for example, to examine the issue whether there should be public policy segregating

people by age in educational institutions. Implicit in such a re-examination would be at least a reevaluation of the validity and usefulness of the concept of youth.

Putting aside the basic question, I would now like to turn to conceptions of youth which do not challenge youth as an important analytical policy category. While it may seem so, it is not just a natural occurrence that youth emerged as a major public policy object in the 1960's. The way was prepared by much academic research making strategic decisions that youth was an important researchable topic. President Kennedy's efforts put a new and intensive policy focus on youth, out of which emerged a conception in the Kennedy message and the subsequent juvenile delinquency community action and other programs in the mid-1960's. The conception of youth in the Kennedy message bears resurrection. The youth of the nation are the trustees of posterity. Such attributes as energy, a readiness to question, imagination, and creativity are all attributes of youth that are essential to our total national character to the extent that the nation is called upon to promote and protect the interest of our younger citizens. It is an investment certain to bring a high return, not only in basic human value, but in social and economic terms.

Professor Rosenheim, a colleague of mine at the School of Social Work Administration at the University of Chicago, notes that running away is a nearly universal activity of youth in the course of growing up. It is now generally conceded that running away is not "deviant" behavior. In effect, she is saying that runaways are not all that different from youth in general. In viewing the various categories of runaways, Rosenheim described the "rule of the roost" in the 1940's to the 1960's, namely the psychiatric conception which viewed running away as symptomatic of severe pathology. Underlying the pathology conception, the work of these researchers who obtained the data from broader sources, school records, parents, and runaways themselves leaves Professor Rosenheim in a position that the new data "support what might be termed a normalizing view of running away; that is, running away alone does not demonstrate pathology. On the contrary, it might be a healthy response to an uncomfortable

environment." This leads us then to view young people as inherently normal even when engaged in such apparently deviant behavior as running away. "Thus, these observations justify looking at runaways not as cases of pathology, but as youngsters displaying normal problems." Rosenheim would normalize youth, but she urges that we do not problemize youth. She notes, "too often obtaining help depends on being pronounced a problem. For many of us it would be more accurate to say we have problems."

It is important to practice which conception is chosen. Professor Rosenheim is very clear that conceptions have specific program consequences. She notes that persons who only have a problem "are not very interesting to professionals, but professionals display an attractable tendency to problemize." As a result, specialists find it hard to think straight about human services in general, and runaways in particular. On the other hand, a normalizing concept, because the problem is not located solely and strategically in an individual, opens up new human service options, alternatives to standard professional categorical approaches. Community becomes a distinct and important option. I would conclude that since conception is so important and since universities and academic service to youth is the creation and judging of conception, that an institution of higher education has a special protective perception of youth. It is obliged to "come to grips" with the well-defended travesties of the system, especially the youth matters. I do not mean to substitute solicitude for science, and there is no credit simply in defending (past) idealism. But there is undoubtedly gain from building on views that are sensible data based on and solicitous of their subject. The harsh views will always be a strong presence, and government planning bureaucracies will continue to be under pressure for developing harsh, concept-based programs.

I wish now to come to my second point. This point is that the high desirability of education providing services and structure is as broad as the public policy problems they address. There is a worthy argument often vehemently made in higher education that higher education should innovate conceptions which should stop at the innovation stage, leaving the applied functions and the expression of a concept in action "foreign

policy" to other institutions. A less vigorous version of this argument leaves the question of follow-through from concept policy to action to serendipity, that is, to the chance emergence of apparent usefulness of an idea, either because its usefulness or application is self-evident once the basic concept is formulated.

However, I question whether or not serendipity (chance) or aggregating market-type actions are enough. The complexity of problems in the area of youth, or any major policy area, requires the consideration of the insights and methodologies of numerous disciplines if there is to be a chance to do any more than merely live with current major social problems. It is very clear after the past decade of experience that partial approaches, and categorical approaches, are of limited help. Universities are one of the few places where it is at least possible to transcend the partial, and produce service structures which program administrators will find deal more adequately with the many-sided problems common here.

However, it is only fair to deal with the counter arguments, namely that such action orientation not only lies outside the true essence of the university or college, but will positively get in its way. Attempts have been made in the past 10 or 15 years to cut across policy structures in the universities, which have by and large produced academic units which have failed to find a permanent "niche." With few exceptions, these attempts have produced trivial or shoddy products that are judged by higher education, or that the inventions called for are better done by other institutions. For example, government planning units would do that anyway regardless of university output in the field. In my view, these arguments will not "wash."

In a real sense, higher education, whether research or teaching, cannot fulfill its own basic mission without traveling along the entire path from conception formulation to program and organizational design. Avoiding this path unwisely limits essential academic contact with empirical material. The mission to invent human services and organizations provides an experimental context. The proper approach to dignifying the university's fundamental work is to shift its perspective from that of the detached observer, from an observer-participant to an observer-operant. If these

points are true, then the fact that higher education has failed today in the way it has gone about policy service structure invention is not a major objection to higher education taking on policy services invention as an important mission.

The argument still remains to let government do it. The difficulty of that position is that government does not know how to do it. Government is simply not a hospitable place to the kind of fundamental and interdisciplinary thinking about human services and structures that is required. Even after the arguments against organized institutional action can be overborn, there still remains the problem of the design of the unit which will create, continuously, rational domain and effective human services in the human service structure.

There are presently units and universities which lead this way. Institutes such as the early institute of this university are a step in the proper direction, though still not broad enough based perhaps. Schools of social work are another effort. However, social work ignores wide sectors of humanity which, in its own way, needs as much attention.

There has emerged in the past ten years another interdisciplinary focus organized at a broader basis than the area of special institutes or social work. They generally are referred to as public policy programs. As they have developed throughout the country, they have shown a potential facility for bringing together faculty from many parts of the university or college and from many disciplines, bringing them together in an organized effort to connect the conceptual work with the disciplines with the operating needs of public policy. They can approach policy areas, such as those which involve youth, from a perspective as broad as the area itself. Of all the interesting units, these may hold as the most promising, focusing the basic and applied work of the institution of higher education and the research and educational program properly on broad ground. They possess an orientation toward bringing out of that focus services and structures dealing with special problems such as those involving youth. The encouragement of the development of public policy programs may make a major difference in services to youth.

Finally, I wish to argue that universities should involve themselves in

a systematic policy in their own communities. That is, purveying in sensible form its formulation of youth and other concepts, testing them, adapting its service and structural inventions to a place, and in so doing, developing and strengthening the concept of community. There are many benefits which can follow from such bold action for the institution teaching research programs to the community. There are many benefits issuing from community action that I have stressed which universities can uniquely help develop. The timeliness, of course, derives from the unusual position taken by President Carter, namely, that federal reorganization is of top priority. While there is a strong general case for community, a specific modality calls for the kind of thinking and analysis as well as a kind of sympathy, or empathy, which can often be found in institutions of higher education. This requires universities to create matrices or models for operating programs, to build and plan on evaluation training mechanism, and to train planners and administrators to work these so-called models,

I find that there is a pressing need for some form of community action simply in order to get the business of government done. Consider, for example, that there are states which are little more than assemblies of mindlessly competitive men cancelling out sub-governmental jurisdictions. Their program focuses are almost impossible to obtain. There are states which opt out of government as a mode of hand, in poor cities and rural populations ill-staffed, and there are cities which govern only part time, where the program recipients are engaged in a continuous "shell game" at the three levels of government which intermittently and uncoordinatedly operate there.

There are also city-state combinations which together make bad problems even worse. A city, for example, is constitutionally required to care and offer concern for its own poor; on the other hand, a state whose administrative performance, which consists of erecting blockades for poor by leveling eligibility determinations, are chronically slow. Even after that, service is always delayed, and checks always late. Not all localities have as severe progressive deterioration of municipal services, social disorganization, racial isolation, lethal impediments to free mobility, and incidents of uncontrolled civic crime unknown and unacceptable

to the previous generation. Problems such as these will not yield to conventional organization. Redemption is required, not simply reorganization. Neither a new Hoover commission, new Human Resources Department, new boxes on the chart, new civil service rules, new staff or supervisory training program, new pay scales, nor another new round of federalism, will help.

It is merely a fashion of revenue sharing which results in newer or bigger holes to pour money down. All of these have been tried for a sufficient time and on a sufficient scale, and the situation is yet as I described it. There is only one possible reorganization option, to build a new local organizational base. That is to reinforce or create new local units for planning, coordinating, and delivering programs. Its focus will not come from the top down, it has to be from the bottom up, in order to reinforce or create new local units for planning and coordinating and delivering programs. This means to turn to the blocks of neighborhoods of towns and cities, villages and districts of our rural areas, to create self-sustaining units able to use resources to solve its own problems in its own way.

As I see it then, this is the specific challenge to universities, the mission of training and eliciting the services of youth and others in the communities, by helping to create genuine autonomous small units of self-government. Thus, building on continual research findings should be the primary mission of institutions at this time to help reinforce and build local structures. This is the way to serve youth by an implementation arrangement which can deliver unprogrammed goals, which almost alone have the potential to synergize federal programs.

**END**