■ This article provides a better understanding of the teaching of general education and its advantages than many superficial statements on the subject.

GENERAL EDUCATION – A NEW DIRECTION

It has always puzzled me to try to understand our academic mentality. Ideally, we agree that general and special education should supplement each other. Practically, we find ourselves in verbal conflict, in which general education usually comes out second-best. Tradition is not on its side, nor is prestige. Today a teacher's value is too often measured by the number of grants he brings to the institution and the smallness of the time he devotes to teaching.

Certainly general education must take some of the responsibility for its present uneasy position. We have put things together in a kind of crazy quilt fashion. We have denounced survey courses as superficial but in effect have gone right on using them. We have set up thousands of high-sounding objectives for our courses while paying little or no attention to the real residues the student may carry away from them. Frightened by the bogy of standards, we have made our courses difficult instead of challenging and interesting. Like the rest of higher education, we have spoonfed our students with well organized lectures, controlled their supposedly immature minds in class discussion, and give them little or no chance to discover the joy of learning for themselves or creating vital ideas of their own. I am more convinced than ever that we can produce better learning by doing less so-called teaching.

As David Riesman puts it, "There is the paradoxical possibility that teachers are now too erudite and capable, for their students are given to feel that there is little left to discover for themselves... There is hardly any room in which students can outflank (their teachers) and gain the feeling of in-

dependence that comes in this way."

In the natural sciences, for example, the teachers have been too devoted to their subject matter to do a good job for the nonscientist. I have about come to the conclusion that this job in science for the non-scientist might be better done by a philosopher — or by a scientist-philosopher-historian team. Graduate preparation of all kinds of college teachers, narrowly specialized as it is, gets in our way and keeps us from breathing life and meaning into liberal education.

General education is not merely the victim of change; it is also the victim of its own blundering, philandering, and of its efforts to gain academic erudition. But let us not overlook its successes. It has opened the doors to experimentation, to better ways of dealing with the vastness of accelerating knowledge, and to better teaching. It has produced many fine programs and kept hopes alive for reaching more vital goals.

It has by no means completed its mission, nor has it failed in its mission. Those who strangle it to provide more time for specialization are focusing merely on a brief moment of the present. Yes, we need technicians and specialists. We also need in these same human beings those who can see, think, and evaluate the possibilities of the future in terms of the swift-moving present. Our pressing problems are not technical; they are human.

When we are willing to take a close look at the needs of our college product, when we are willing to quit building curriculums for the convenience of faculties and turn our attention to the student — how he learns, and what we can do to help him help himself — when we recognize that we as teachers have only a humble place in the learning process as the starters and promoters of self-discovery and self-achievement, we will not need to worry longer about any conflict between breadth and depth. It will take care of itself. We can achieve this by doing less teaching, thus providing opportunity for more learning.

At this moment, one can see ahead only a hazy continuation of the present trend. There is only the mad drive for specialization and *more* education, whatever its nature. Continuing down this path indefinitely can lead only to debasing the academic currency.

General education needs to take a new direction. It has spent too much time revising and tinkering with curriculums and too little effort stimulating and inspiring students. Our curriculums must relate more closely to life, to change, and to students. I have said many times that general education curriculums should be torn up and thrown away every five years. Only in this way can they retain vitality.

We need to reduce and simplify our objectives and bring them closer to life. The student today is merely jumping through hoops to get that coveted degree. Yet we think we are providing him with an education. If it is true that students no longer trust anyone over 30, we need to take a long hard look at what is wrong with us and our system. They have good reason to distrust us.

We have long needed more meaningful preparation of college teahers, not only for general education but all fields. It is not enough today to be able to talk and to know one's subject well. This kind of handout teaching reaches the lowest level of efficiency if we are talking about real education.

Most desperately we need experimentation in new ways of teaching as reflected in student learning, which is, after all, the only reason for teaching. We need a few institutions willing to go all out in experimenting, with the focus on the learning-teaching process, in an honest and sustained effort to release all students from our present *stupid system of credit accounting* and the debased state of classroom-handout bondage. Student independene and freedom to learn, even if the process is slow and painful, must be the major objectives. I am convinced that there is private-venture capital available to any institutions willing to

strike out boldly in this direction.

It is time for this kind of experimentation on a major scale. *The place for it is in general education, where what we cover is of much less importance than what the student does with his own mind.* We have all the accessory apparatus for moving rapidly ahead, such as teaching machines, workbooks, textbooks, and audiovisual tapes to provide essential handout learning of facts. The teacher must be free for the critical job — to raise questions (but not to answer them), to guide, prod, lead, provoke, and counsel as needed.

This, is my judgment, is the essential direction general education must take — to lead the way up and out of an educational stalemate with massive efforts to blast a new road toward intellectual freedom. A former speech teacher, now an eminent statesman-leader, said recently: *"Most of all we need an education that will create the educated mind — not simply a repository of information and skills, but a source of creative skepticism, characterized by a willingness to challenge and be challenged... It means a fundamental improvement in the quality of our education."*

But there is no way to improve the quality of education without seeking new directions. We have come close to the end of conventional improvements — better lectures, better discussions, better textbooks, better facilities. *Experiment after experiment has shown us that students learn about the same amount of subject matter whether they are in large classes or small classes, lectures or discussions, before living teachers or viewing audiovisual tapes, before machines or using workbooks. We have juggled with such experiments long enough.*

We need a few courageous institutions willing to take this kind of risk, not to introduce safe independent honors programs for the selected few, but to go out for freedom from traition and bondage — for all. *Team teaching, with its strong counseling segment*

and its emphasis on the student, provides an ideal starting place.

The situation indicates the need for a sharp change in direction. Someone must make the change boldly; someone must support it generously; someone must produce this minor miracle quickly. The alternative for general education is gentle demise. The alternative for all of higher education is a half-life of useless residue. There is already a wide-open door — through well conceived existing programs of general education, and some willing leaders. — *By Sidney J. French in the Journal of General Education.*

LIFE WITHOUT PRINCIPLE

If I should sell both my forenoons and afternoons to society, as most appear to do, I am sure that, for me, there would be nothing left worth living for. I trust that I shall never thus sell my birthright for a mess of pottage. I wish to suggest that a man may be very industrious, and yet not spend his time well. There is no more fatal blunderer than he who consumes the greater part of his life getting his living. All great enterprises are self-supporting. The poet, for instance, must sustain his body by his poetry, as a steam planing-mill feeds its boilers with the shavings it makes. *You must get your living by loving.* But as it is said, of the merchants that ninety-seven in a hundred fail, so the life of men generally, tried by this standard, is a failure, and bankruptcy may be surely prophesied. — *Henry David Thoreau*