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**Community Outreach : A Synergistic Approach
to Post-Secondary Education**

par

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COMMUNITY OUTREACH: A SYNERGISTIC APPROACH TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

by Phyllis E. Bailey
with Lisa Maria Lackey

Dr. Ernest Boyer, President of the *Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* and former U.S. Commissioner of Education has urged that all college and university students be required to perform community service before earning a degree. Addressing 300 delegates at the annual meeting of the *American Association of Community and Junior Colleges* at San Diego, Ca. in 1985, he suggested that community colleges were ideal for such a program. Dr. Boyer emphasized the importance of the "community service credit" because, as he put it, "today's students see no connection between what they learn on campus and the real world. The majority feel isolated and lack interest in the world around them."

In the same year, Claude Ryan, Quebec's Minister of Education, spoke to a gathering of educators in Montreal. Like many experts and non-experts alike, Mr. Ryan prescribed a return to *basics* to solve the crisis in education.

He was appropriately rebuked by those in his audience who clearly recognized that a narrow, linear approach was not the answer. Indeed, Dr. Boyer says that without a sense of "interdependence and understanding among individuals and nations, young people will remain ignorant, no matter how strong they are in the so-called *basics*."

Dr. Boyer's remarks prove even more relevant now in the nineties than they did seven years ago in the eighties. A majority of young people, indeed, a majority of all people, regardless of age, nationality and socio-economic status, still lack a sense of community and citizenship.

In fact, *Environment Canada* places a strong emphasis on "environmental citizenship" in their funding of *Green Plan* initiatives now prominent in the news because of this summer's *Earth Summit* in Brazil.

Synergistic solutions address education crisis

Today, I shall discuss solutions that not only address the concern of Claude Ryan and others about *basics* but also take into account the community service component advocated by Ernest Boyer. *Synergy*, where the whole effect exceeds the sum of independent parts taken separately, creatively offsets education budget cuts by achieving two or more results for the price of one, "more bang for your education buck."

However, we must extend this notion of *synergy*. An optimum synergistic program not only solves more than one problem, but also 1) incorporates *basics*, 2) con-

tributes to community well-being, 3) raises student self-esteem, 4) saves money and perhaps even lives and 5) provides income for students and/or the school system.

Here are several examples of synergistic solutions in education, already proven feasible and valuable, followed by several ideas for future programs.

Good synergistic programs already in place

An exciting and ambitious synergistic education project takes place at the Hawaiian campus of *Brigham Young University* where the *Polynesian Cultural Centre* presents visitors with continuous exhibits and demonstrations of the crafts and skills of seven Polynesian Islands displayed in authentic reproductions of native villages. Spectacular afternoon and evening shows highlight traditional island chants, dances and music. The Centre's dining room serves sumptuous Polynesian feasts, minus liquor, tea or coffee, of course, since *Brigham Young* is a *Latter Day Saint (Mormon)* institution.

As a commercial venture, this is most impressive; as an educational project, implemented by university faculty, staff and students, the program exemplifies a true synergy.

Firstly, it works to maintain the rapidly-dying indigenous Polynesian culture, not only for the benefit of visitors and tourists, but also for students from all over Polynesia who attend the university and participate in the activities of the Centre. These people, with otherwise little or no access to their fading culture, take home their knowledge and skills and pass them on to others.

Secondly, students working at the Centre earn enough money to pay their way through university.

Thirdly, the *Polynesian Cultural Centre*, one of the main tourist attractions in Hawaii, enjoys substantial revenue.

What a great thing if our own community colleges, universities and high schools could partner with government, industry, local communities and native reserves to launch similar projects that preserve and disseminate the ethnic and cultural richness of the Canadian mosaic, rapidly being lost through technological expansion and assimilation.

According to Christopher Lasch, *narcissism* - the neurotic love for self - is a serious problem in North America today. In *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), Lasch deplores the current preoccupation with self, the loss of historical continuity and the lack of commitment to community. Ironically, the narcissism of youth and others is often accompanied by lack of self esteem, in other words, obsession with self does not necessarily mean love of self; quite the contrary.

Clearly, much malaise undermining and even destroying society could be overcome if children and young

people became aware of responsibility to others through a sense of community involvement. What better way to promote this than by building it into the school curriculum for a synergistic answer to the crisis of the individual, the community and all of society?

Academic credit for community work experience

In 1977, the U.S. federal government passed the *Youth Employment Demonstration Projects Act* awarding education credits for active participation in community services. Because of a time lag in information dissemination and partly due to feelings of threat accompanying any suggestion of major change, this notion of action learning has spread only slowly throughout North America.

In Rye, New York, all high school students must do 60 hours of community service in order to graduate. Maryland has just passed state legislation requiring community service as a prerequisite to high school graduation..

Leading advocates of *Academic Credit for Community Work Experience* recognize these requirements as a synergistic way to upgrade education and community services while saving money. However, with all the good intentions in the world, although many educational institutions give credit to students involved in community activities, very few have incorporated *basics*. Without *basics*, these projects, although synergistic cannot be defined as optimum.

Student describes recent project

I will now invite Lisa Maria Lackey, a student in one of my classes, to describe a project that, in a small way, demonstrates the notion of synergy. I emphasize, however, that Ms. Lackey is not an example of the students described by Dr. Boyer as isolated and uninvolved. She would be a top-level student with a strong social conscience under any circumstances, so, although she is an excellent mentor to others, she herself is not necessarily a top priority target of such a program.

(Lisa Maria Lackey): Last semester, a group of us decided to develop a post-card campaign asking the Prime Minister to take a message to the *Earth Summit* about synergistic solutions for environment and development. The campaign took place mainly at our college where we asked students and staff to read and sign the messages on the postcards.

Along with the call for synergistic solutions, the postcards also recommended founding a *National Corps of Youth Ombudspersons*. We defined *Ombudsperson*, because we knew that most people did not know the meaning of this Swedish word, describing the role of complaint officer and red-tape cutter trained to overcome power abuse that prevents implementation or even communication of innova-

tive programs. As Phyllis Bailey explained, there are many successful no-cost and low-cost programs in environment and development but information systems are so clogged we often don't know about these programs. We must spread this information and the *Youth Ombudscorps* will be taught how to open up communication to do this.

We invited people to add their own personal messages to the Prime Minister, although we had to weed out a few that were slightly obscene. Now, we delivered some basic political science because the average person did not know that you could write your Member of Parliament postage free and that, by law, the M.P., in this case, the Prime Minister, who, of course, is an M.P., must reply to the communication. We also learned that M. P.'s consider every piece of mail they get from constituents represents at least 20 votes.

I extended the campaign to some elementary schools. My own personal interest is to prevent the clear-cutting of the B.C. temperate rain forest.

We put new words and phrases, like "clear-cutting" into the children's vocabularies and raised their environmental consciousness. They reacted emotionally to information that irreplaceable mature trees, some over a thousand years old, were being cut down. They were fascinated to learn they could write postage-free to their M.P.'s and the letters would be taken seriously. Some said they were going to do more of that. Some also donated money to an "adopt-a-tree" project.

A fellow student, who involved a local girl guide troop, marvelled at the environmental awareness of the children. She said the campaign exemplified how a few people could make a difference and that you don't need money to do it! The postcards were all done on scrap paper. We were lucky to find hundreds of strips of yellow cardboard, thrown out, that made perfect postcards. That's even better than using recycled material because recycling costs money and harms the environment while reusing does not.

I learned a lot from this project. Aside from the basic information in political science I both learned and taught, I learned a lot about the environment because I had to do research in order to teach the children about clear-cutting. I also felt really good about being a mentor to the children and, of course, I loved that I could apply my research and get credit for doing a real project instead of just a term paper that only the teacher would read.

All in all, we collected over nine hundred postcards and this with a minimum of work. I'll now give the floor back to my teacher so she can share with you some more ideas she has about synergistic education.

(Phyllis E. Bailey) Thank you, Lisa Maria. The postcard campaign was a great success. I have never seen such a high level of motivation. Almost everyone, of all ages, wanted to send a postcard to the Prime Minister. There is no doubt this could have been a national campaign,

if we had had more time. As I wrote in a letter to Arthur Campeau, the Prime Minister's Ambassador to the *Earth Summit*, "Tell the Prime Minister to count his blessings that the Post Office and he were not inundated with one million yellow postcards."

Although, to many people, the term "political activist" conjures up visions of student radicals burning down college buildings, I have to say just the opposite. We must teach our young people, in or out of school, to be political activists precisely so that they don't have to resort to violent tactics to bring about change. A postcard campaign, for example, involves people in the political process and gives them a sense of their own empowerment in communicating their wishes to the politicians.

No limit to scope of synergistic projects

The scope of synergistic projects that can be undertaken by community college students has almost no limit.

In April, 1990, the *Conference Board of Canada* held the first national conference on *Business and Education Partnerships* in Toronto. I and an associate in the *Synergistic Problem-Solving Institute*, of which I am Canadian director, polled delegates at this conference. We asked their opinion about having chemistry and biology teachers clocking in at the industrial workplace with science students to monitor pollution and convert pollutants to non-pollutant chemical bi-products while learning basic chemistry and biology. The majority agreed that students might be able to do what is not cost-feasible for industry. Moreover, education costs would be reduced because expensive laboratory equipment and material in schools would be eliminated - not to mention all the difficult-to-dispose-of toxic chemicals used in experiments.

All this must be done by a consortium of government, industry, business, education and other community institutions. Top experts in each field design the curriculum to insure maximum synergy and optimum incorporation of "basics." Students and participants from "target" populations have major input to ensure that the program is comprehensive and comprehensible.

Few people know that nursery school children can use empty tuna and soda cans to construct no-cost solar panels to supply heat and hot water to school buildings. They not only learn basic principles of science and math but also derive a sense of pride doing something useful for community and environment. High school and college students can play a tutorial role, freeing hard-working teachers to pay attention to problem students and to curriculum development.

Students can actively participate in projects which not only upgrade their own learning skills but also produce learning environments for those not in school who seek to enhance knowledge.

A recent informal poll at the Peel and Henri Bourassa Metro stations in Montreal, revealed that fewer than one in ten passengers knew about the men for whom the stations were named. (Sir Robert Peel, founder of the British Police Force, nicknamed "bobbies" or "peelers" after him and Henri Bourassa, Quebec nationalist and founder of the newspaper, *Le Devoir*.)

Too bad history students working with art and word processing students as well as English and French students, all receiving course credit, could not collaborate to make these dreary places a learning environment for bored Metro and bus passengers.

Environment a "teaching machine"

The environment is a largely unutilized teaching machine, waiting for business and education to get together and program it. Anyone who has seen children in a playground, sliding through a model of the human heart, learning anatomy while having fun, will know what I mean.

Next semester, a group of students in my classes will form a partnership with an environmental group on a local Indian Reserve. They will learn basic sociological concepts and change agent skills by drafting legislation and writing grant proposals. They will upgrade their sense of responsibility, community involvement and self-esteem through interaction with native leaders and elected political officials.

Another group will form a *Health OmbudsCorps* to monitor food labels in super markets and learn to communicate information about factors such as food additives and passive smoke which are harmful to health and drive up the costs of our health delivery system. The synergy, of course, will include learning basics in biology and chemistry.

And the result of all this synergy? I'd like to close this presentation with an extended quote from *The One-Hour Solution* (©), a novel I recently co-authored with Rosalyn L. Switzen, Director of *The National Ombudsadvisory of the United States*, designer of the *Head Start Program* in the U.S. and founder of the *Synergistic Problem-Solving Institute*, among other organizations.

The excerpt describes the results of implementing synergistic education sometime early in the next millennium.

The world became a true global village, people empathetically aware of others, committed to helping each other, not just in crises, like earthquakes and hurricanes, as in the old days, but on an ongoing basis.

Thousands of schools picked up Stan's no-cost solar heat panel directions. Almost overnight, school heating bills plummeted. High school students used the plans, appropriately modified, to build passive solar greenhouses. The vegetables they grew, while learning basic biology,

supplied the school cafeteria. They sold the surplus fresh produce at low prices to senior citizens, and synergistically learned principles of business and marketing.

Teens now had adequate spending money through honest effort. They got "high" on productivity and their sense of community involvement; they didn't have to resort to harmful and destructive artificial stimulants. Boredom and malaise had resulted from lack of purpose, leading many into self-destructive behaviour like drug use and suicide.

Young people engaged in other money-making activities for an unprecedented improvement in health and quality of life. They turned cities green with windowboxes. Rooftops became miniature farms as slum-dwellers cultivated crops with solar greenhouses, constructed by students from recycled waste.

Slums themselves became quality residential communities when tenants formed co-ops to buy out landlords and renovated their properties. Apprentice electricians, plumbers, painters and plasterers from vocational schools and colleges were trained on-site in these synergistic projects.

It was all done at no cost to the taxpayer. As a matter of fact, taxes fell sharply as the nation made headway in wiping out the giant deficit.

School kids became experts in monitoring food labels while synergistically learning basic chemistry and biology about the make-up of food additives as well as their consequences for people's health and behaviour. Food manufacturers were enjoined to stop adding harmful chemicals to their products. Rose's dream that children would teach adults came true as kids instructed parents in proper health and nutrition practices.

Improvement in diet and elimination of many external stress factors paid off as health improved. Aggressiveness was sharply curtailed in people no longer addicted to mood altering junk food and chemical pollutants.

Schools expanded synergistic arts and crafts programs. To be synergistic, a project had to use recycled material, produce something aesthetically pleasing and incorporate basic principles of math, science or social science.

Children collected old newspapers and created papier maché sculptures for history, science and behaviour science museums, constructed in every school and almost every public building. Art classes collected scrap material and made plaques to label flowers and trees in the park so that passersby could get swift botany lessons if they wished.

Street corners and subway stops had mini-history and geography lessons put together by students, under their teachers' supervision; people could read and learn while they waited for their buses and trains. Junk sculpture was all the rage. In parks and playgrounds, children climbed all over elephants and dinosaurs they themselves had constructed from old rubber tires, once an environmental menace when they

caught fire and filled the atmosphere with toxic waste. Used tires also provided construction material for playhouses and community centres, beautiful and luxurious beyond belief.

The environment was now a full-fledged teaching machine, programmed so that everyone had access to information. Unions did not object because students were doing only what was not cost-feasible for government or the private sector.

Many synergistic programs already exist. Others just await release by the creative brainstorming of those motivated to implement them. Let's hope community organizations, both in the public and private sectors, will form partnerships to upgrade education and community services while stamping out wasteful and unnecessary individual and government spending.

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