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# *Liberal Education and the Challenge of Intergrative Learning*

*Bernice Braid  
Long Island University*

The 1990 publication of Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* was a benchmark occasion. Almost immediately the academy endorsed his document's usefulness as a framework within which to examine, maybe rethink, practices of both institutions and individuals which appeared to reflect a riven enterprise. Boyer's perception that exclusive emphasis on "scholarship" for status and rewards in American colleges was, as the term remained narrowly defined, incompatible with the demands of proliferation and access, and it struck a chord.

His way of framing discourse about scholarship, his suggestion that a broadening and redefinition of the term "scholarship" might serve to help institutions cope with practical and fiscal reality, was the focus of general interest. Both in professional conferences and on campus, his framing resonated with the felt contradictions between the rhetoric and reality of access already at the heart of a growing debate about undergraduate education. His proposal was that we accept varieties of scholarship—"of discovery, integration, application, and teaching"—as equally important, and to do so as a means of reconstituting a structure intended now to reflect "the full range of academic and civic mandates" of the professoriate (Boyer, p. 16). Doing this, he argued, would provide a matrix within which issues of quality and assessment of performance could be handled more appropriately for this new era in academic history.

The faculty debate I witnessed took up eagerly his four categories of research. Finding ways to 'appreciate' work undertaken in laboratory, library, classroom, committee, community organization, and the world of work had instant appeal. Indeed, Boyer's categories appeared to offer a foundation for discourse among vocational and liberal arts faculties that promised genuine recognition of professional productivity, but also of underlying values and commitments that those of us in liberal arts took to be our domain, and that we presumed were wanting in the bedrock of colleagues in disciplines outside arts and sciences—values and commitments that could be embraced by an entire campus joined in a single effort to organize mutually acceptable activities, and assessment of them.

At the same time, it seemed essential to think through how these four classes of scholarship, if indeed we endorsed them as equally significant, might play out in an actual course. Linking the discussion of rewards to that of pedagogy was, however, not something many faculty seemed prepared to undertake. It was evident from the outset that imagining how the experiences of a) a faculty member and b) a student might represent, in any given syllabus/course, the activities inherent in all

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four categories was an elusive challenge, not to say experientially remote conception.

As is often the case with cultural sea-change, others had also been thinking aloud about rifts in the academy. Parker Palmer was one whose insights resounded perhaps surprisingly, given his emphasis on communal engagement. But he sounded a note heard for years afterwards with his address at the annual meeting of the American Association for Higher Education, in 1988, "Community, Conflict, and Ways of Knowing." This address, published in the association's *Change* magazine the same year, reached many in higher education. He argued for "new epistemologies" that "juxtapose analysis with synthesis, integration, and the creative act" (Palmer, p.24). The need for new epistemologies, for Palmer, derives from his conclusion that the academy has produced in our students a "trained schizophrenia."

They have always been taught about a world out there somewhere apart from them, divorced from their personal lives; they never have been invited to intersect their autobiographies with the life story of the world. (Palmer, p.22)

Palmer's reasoning is that to the extent we train our students to objectify, to presume a gulf between themselves and the world they examine, to that extent they will not "intersect their biographies with the life story of the world." Hence he urges the development of ways of knowing that connect knower to known. The "juxtaposition of analysis with synthesis, integration, and the creative act" is the positing of an intellectual objective: if students can be brought into a learning environment where these four kinds of thinking are juxtaposed, they will be building a foundation on which an entire edifice—a lifetime of connected knowing—might be built.

Palmer's phrase "communal conflict" characterizes, then, the relational structure and the way individuals in it can deal with one another, with information, with the search for knowledge and insights. It jibes well with Boyer's four categories of scholarship, if one can imagine all four as components of a single mind's on-going activity.

I propose that a course, or cluster of courses and experiences, be considered a single whole for the student, in parallel to the lifetime whole of the professor. That is, I propose that we find ways of bringing the reconsidered scholarship of which Boyer speaks to the drawing board, and begin to imagine moments in a student's life when all four categories of scholarship-as-reconsidered occur in the same time frame, not strung out seriatim. I propose we implement the design project by incorporating, to foster the desired outcome of this project, the juxtaposition of analysis, synthesis, integration and the creative act.

The National Collegiate Honors Council has, in its organizational history, engaged in one experiment that aims for these goals: its Honors Semesters. These are site-specific, experiential opportunities that draw students away from the familiar to work and live as a residential group in an unfamiliar setting. All courses and activities revolve around some theme especially rich to explore in this site.

From the moment of their arrival, participating students are thrust together in a problem-setting mode. Explorations of the local environment, participant-observer field inquiry, research projects undertaken here that could not be done as well

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elsewhere, processed through sustained self-reflective discourse and the pressure-cooker living community, all drive the contextualization of student learning. Consistent focus on self-reflection—on questions of how the viewer sees, and why, and to what end—generate a laboratory for perceptions about self-in-context. Students manage, in one short term, to pull together the civic dimension explicit in the larger environment and implicit in their small living unit within a campus enclave, and to bring to their individual directed research topics not only insights gained from reading/lectures/interviews—but from their refined sense of how these many socio-political spheres encroach upon their topic, and themselves—and vice versa. The structure and scope of their investigation of experience is such that juxtapositions are unavoidable. The sense of wholeness students express, and of their discovery that the many parts of their experiences are deeply connected, through and in them, is powerful. Learning that analysis, synthesis, integration and creative acts are not antithetical classes of abstract processes, but are kinds of thinking and doing that co-exist, appears to be transformative in NCHC's Semesters alums.

Both Boyer and Palmer were motivated to shape their arguments as they did in part out of a keen sense that the academy is somehow fractured. For Boyer, the professoriate is besieged by contradictory demands and practices; for Palmer, its students are “trained” schizophrenics left disconnected from their world. The model of programs that function as an organic whole anchored in the world, validating and privileging practices in the world which students analyze and refract through a lens of which they are sufficiently conscious to synthesize what they see within some larger context, leads inexorably to an integrated view of the world and themselves in it. It leads to unusual creative leaps, as reports on the closing Symposia of these Semesters have suggested (Braid, 1985; 1991).

This model is interesting as well in terms of what might be called the civic concerns of Boyer and Palmer. NCHC's Honors Semesters began in 1976. There have been twenty-five of them. None has focused exclusively on matters like social equality, issues in human rights, or political responsibility. Yet given the students' immersion in the larger social arena of their site, considering problems such as these has been part of every Semester's discussions. The proliferation of project topics during Semesters that examine closely environmental, social, and political matters is impressive. The persistent phenomenon of Semesters Alums' moving into fields like human rights abuses against the Romani (Gypsies) in Romania, joining the Peace Corps, or becoming involved in social projects designed to benefit others, suggests that, once students acquire the habit of mind of connecting themselves to the world, they do not easily lose it.

This is a model worth elaborating on because it includes elements that the many service/volunteer/foreign study programs around the country do not: the self-reflective activities that require analysis, for one, and the contextualizing of self-in-setting for another. Both are pedagogical strategies that can well be imbedded in campus course structure. The fact that in this year 2000 the academy is still trying to frame an action plan for the professoriate that addresses the concerns raised by Boyer's rifts and Palmer's splits suggests that we have not found ways to adapt for use on our own campus the import of these two essays. In *The Professoriate and Institutional Citizenship: Toward a Scholarship of Service*, Jerry Berberet argues:

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At a time when students are flocking to campus service learning programs...the faculty voice regarding how the civic dimension of higher education's traditional mission should be enacted at the dawn of a new millennium is largely unheard. *This silence continues although advocates such as Alexander Astin and Carol Schneider have been vocal and visible in recommending that civic education be imbedded in the curriculum and the work of disciplines: that theoretical knowledge, experiential learning, and disciplined reflection are essential components of civic education* (italics added); and that institutions must assure that their student bodies reflect the larger society's diversity and intellectual pluralism. (Berberet, p.36)

His organization, Associated New American Colleges, has embarked on a Pew Charitable Trusts grant to flesh out implications for the professoriate of Boyer's arguments:

We have incorporated Boyer's call for integrative approaches, whether in connecting the various components of the campus in order better to serve student learning or in understanding all major faculty responsibilities as a form of scholarship....(Berberet, p.37)

I join their arguments with another: liberal learning has always been rooted in the spirit of breadth and shaped by the practice of depth. In its origins it sought to produce educated people capable of clear, reasoned thought who were aware of the larger cultural domains in which that thought must flourish. Liberal learning became linked, during the early 80's wave of academic reform, to active learning as a means toward self-liberating achievements. The work of Gamson, Chickering, Smith, Clinchy and her associates, was full of the wisdom that connects theory and practice. These practitioners—master teachers we came to call them—were the research voices of the 80's and 90's whose observations and experiments gave voice to pedagogical concerns of liberal arts institutions.

Boyer's conclusion for the professoriate was that "knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching" (Boyer, p. 24). Twinning his argument to faculty with Palmer's proposed epistemology of knowing—the four-part juxtaposition of analysis, synthesis, integration and the creative act—we have an opportunity to think about re-ordering our work by re-ordering the experiences of instructor and student simultaneously. This is an invitation for change in approaches to liberal arts undergraduate education. Since virtually all degree programs require significant exposure to arts and sciences, it is reasonable to suppose that fundamental shifts in course design will have a direct impact on professional practices in all domains.

There has already been much borrowing from schools of architecture, engineering, and the health professions for use in the humanities, social sciences, and even business. Legitimate "practicum" segments drawn from applied science and adapted to arts and sciences have made inroads into the primacy of theory-only practices. Incorporated into liberal arts, and translated into a variety of "social laboratory" settings, the beginning has surely been made to provide some measure

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of access to multiple ways of knowing such as Palmer urges.

The converse has happened as well: the model of open-ended discussion based on interpretation, synthesis and application drawn from philosophically oriented disciplines has worked its way into discussion sessions formally part of medical school teaching. Either direction, some things are clear: assigning studio problems, bench labs, or volunteer placements does not, merely by the students' completion of those assignments, produce the connected knowing that Blythe Clinchy and her colleagues stress. An arena in which both analysis of the raw field experience and synthesis of that material with scholarly theory are mediated by expert voices—the integration required for really creative acts—is what is needed. A venue in which the nature and extent of interpretation as a facet of analysis, in which the interpreter engages in reflection about self-in-context, in which the matters of evidence and discovery are examined carefully, is also necessary.

Judging from presentations at national associations in which questions about praxis and the lack of opportunity for integrative learning are still being raised, not all campus life has yet been affected by the impulse to synthesize. In fairness, given the hiring activity of the 90's - a refreshing change from the frozen playing fields of the late 70's and early 80's—even were efforts to move on all fronts a common occurrence, newer faculty would still be outsiders in this effort. They have emerged, after all, from the very heart of a split-personality academy that provoked the comments of Boyer and Palmer to begin with.

So it is not, perhaps, out of place to urge that the heart of liberal education's enterprise is to link practice and theory, the workplace and the campus, social theory and lived community, science and humanities, writing and doing. The link must be made by students, but without a venue in which such links are invited—and tested—they will frankly not be made by many.

A modest experiment of my own has been to use Clifford Geertz' field observations on perspective, particularly his thoughts on "blurred genres" (Geertz, 1983), as a guide to constructing an on-campus seminar for students who have off-campus work placements. Both field observations and self-reflective writing, as in the City-as-Text<sup>®</sup> laboratory exercises I developed for the Honors Semesters (Braid, 1990), and elaborate mapping exercises, are integrative stratagems in the methodologies of this Workplace Dynamics course. Readings selected widely from literature, social theory, and political commentary figure in. Technical aspects of students' work performance are reported and viewed by the seminar cohort in the context of the working environment in which they themselves perform.

Remarkably, I have found that students well-trained in sophisticated fields—computers, speech therapy, accounting, health professions—and strong in their disciplines, indicate no discernible mechanism at the outset of the course to measure a) context; b) self; c) self-in-context. They are adept at separating out, but impoverished when it comes to pulling together. No wonder that, despite working in possibly the most diverse city in the world and studying on arguably one of the most multicultural campus sites in the country, these apprentices lack the skills and means to see themselves as others see them; to imagine that insights from art and literature might open a window in the workplace; or to understand that modes of inquiry cannot exist in a cultural vacuum.

The sense of what is a text, any text, is missing; of what relates one thing or event to another, or of how otherwise this same interaction might be viewed: these

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are perceptual matters, and they are missing. The ability to ask, in the public domain, “What makes me think so?” is missing. The desire to answer “What does this have to do with me?” in civic matters, is likely also to be missing.

Agility in using ALL Palmer’s intellectual skills is, I have come to believe, not only a tacit component in the earlier, displaced, paradigm of a well-educated liberally learned citizen, but an actual source of power over one’s place in this world, and it must be re-embraced. Acquiring mental athleticism—through exercises by which one juxtaposes theory and practice—is liberally to educate. And prowess in such exercises is liberating.

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