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DIRECTIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION OF HEARING-IMPAIRED PERSONS

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Introduction

The reader over age 20 will recall some of the "good-news and bad-news" stories that were being told during the 1960s and '70s. With apologies to anyone who remembers this particular one, one story is especially relevant to our topic. It was one warm morning on the ancient Mediterranean Sea, about 600 B.C.; a three-tiered rowing vessel was moving across the sea. On this particular day, the three rows of oarsmen were working especially hard on a very hot day. As the morning began, the slavemaster came on deck and said, "Men, give me your attention, please." They looked up, and he said, "Gentlemen, I have for you today both good news and bad news. First, the good news: today, every man will have an extra olive in his cup, and in addition to that there will be an extra ration of rum for every man." All of the ragged slaves began to smile wanly through their long beards. Then the slavemaster said, "Now, for the bad news: today, the Captain has decided that he would like to go water skiing."

In the field of post-secondary education of the hearing-impaired, we are in a situation where the identification of bad news is very easy to do – continuously shrinking budgets and the continuing difficult problems of how to serve a very challenging clientele. We could easily despair, but there may also be some hidden "good news" that we can uncover.

Let us focus on three major items. First, several background facts that we know from the data; second, a proposal for some changes in our philosophy; and third, a possible menu of specific actions, many of which are in use in some programs.

Background Data

What are the background facts that we know in relation to the hearing-impaired population who are in post-secondary education of any kind? Once again we need to continue those connections that we have established with the world of

professional education *outside* of deafness.

1. In his presentation in 1987 to the CEASD Conference in Santa Fe, Paul Miller, President Emeritus of the Rochester Institute of Technology, provided a quick review of some areas of demographics (Miller, 1987). For example, we know that today approximately one-third of the post-secondary age students who are in college programs of any kind are over 25 years old; and, of that group, three-fourths go to school part-time. Another national trend is that the professional world outside of education is beginning to value other indicators of a person's performance than just a degree or a certificate. The old tradition of the study-work-and retire cycle is no longer applicable to a great many people in this country because we are doing all three things at the same time in the sense of studying, working, and leisuring simultaneously. That trend has implications for educational programming. Whether we like it or not, we are already in an information-centered world that is overwhelming in many ways.

2. Let us look at employment. We know that in the hearing population, of the people who are one year out of high school, more than 82% are in the work force and of that group approximately 85% have a job. Only about 15% are not employed. However, in the hearing-impaired population only a little more than one-half are in what we call the "work force", and only half of that group have regular steady employment. That is a real challenge. Now, we are not focusing only on the population in the traditional community college, junior college, or four-year college. The area of transition from school to work is also critical. In some areas of the nation where there are larger industrial centers, there are important transition programs, as well as life-long learning centers.

3. Let us look now at those unserved or under-served populations in the post-secondary age grouping. Clearly, there is a wide spectrum of handicapping conditions among hearing-impaired young adults who are not now in any program of

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post-secondary education, but who in many cases have the potential to benefit from it. We must avoid the temptation to generalize about such students because they are not *all* low-achieving. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, many are not participating in post-secondary education. As a nation, in general, we are still not addressing the needs of that large percentage of the hearing-impaired adults who are not in a regular program of any kind (part-time or full-time).

Let us step again outside of the sometimes comfortable world of education of hearing-impaired persons and look at what else the general society is telling us. The reader should take the opportunity to read a new book called **Cultural Literacy**, written by a Professor of English at the University of Virginia (Hirsch, 1987). He says nothing about education of deaf persons. But this book may become very important in the history of American education if we look back ten years from now. His theme is that since the beginning of this century the educational system in America has lost the commitment to teaching a common core of knowledge, with the result that when we write something today with a traditional classical reference, there is a real lack of familiarity and in many cases people are not making the appropriate connection. Why? Because the curriculum of the schools has had to encompass many different pressures from a variety of pressure-groups, parent-groups, and multicultural-groups. That pressure, according to Hirsch, has forced us to move away from a common core of knowledge.

We may not only have lost the common core, but we may also be in danger of going all the way back to the level where we will lose sight of the importance of skill development at the same time as we focus on content. We must not make that mistake again.

What relevance does the interest in cultural literacy have for education of deaf persons? We are going to see steadily increasing pressure for us to include more "traditional" knowledge bases in our curriculum in post-secondary education. Now, what will that mean in turn? It will first of all mean asking, "How do you define what is common core?" — *your* core may not be *my* core. So there will be some immediate interesting and sometimes frustrating debate. We can expect that some of the pressure for this trend will come from state legislatures, too.

Changes in Philosophy

Let us move to three areas of needed change in point of view, philosophy, or outlook because before we can discuss any specific actions, we must articulate our points of view on post-secondary education.

1. A bit of "good news" is that we have learned recently from research that it is possible to demonstrate improvement in the potential for learning in the college-aged hearing-impaired adolescent learner (Martin, 1987). For a long time in the field of education, we have had the concept that each individual's capacity for learning is pretty well determined throughout life. There have, however, been many individual educators through the years, particularly since World War II, who have said "No, that's not true." But, there has not been sufficient empirical evidence until relatively recently to support that disagreement. Now we know and can demonstrate that with appropriately prepared instructors who are focusing on general cognitive skills, it is possible to improve the individual's capacity for learning — *no matter who that individual is*. Who among us has the right to say what any person's limits are? We are referring here to generalizable skills that cut across subject fields, including the real world of work and living, such skills as categorization, comparison, organization, and sequencing. Cognitive improvement does not just happen, however, without some *explicit* focus. The first major change in point of view that we must consider, then, is the possibility of *raising* a person's individual capacity for learning: *learning how to learn better*.

2. Following naturally from that point is the topic that received attention in the late 1960's: keeping expectations high. Recently from the classical research community have come challenges to the methodology that was used in conducting some of the experiments where teachers were told that some children had high IQs and some had low, leading to self-fulfilling prophecies in students' achievement. A recent issue of one of the journals of the American Educational Research Association (Rosenthal, 1987) has collected together a number of studies which now strongly support the idea that the expectation level of the instructor can indeed affect the achievement of the learner. But how do you translate that finding into action? Faculty development of our post-secondary faculty is at least one part of that answer.

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3. The third change in philosophy is the concept that we can not prescribe only one set of educational outcomes for all students. This approach not only implies multiple choices of curriculum paths but also experiences within a program which recognize differences in learning style and cultural background. It is not an *inconvenience* to the instructor that there happen to be five different types of learners in her/his class of fifteen; rather, if that instructor has the proper training, she or he can even *take advantage* of those differences to enhance the learning process.

Specific Options

With those facts and viewpoints as background, let us move now to some specific action ideas that follow. Many of these ideas are not necessarily new, but it may be helpful to have a full "menu" in one place to help us see possible actions. Every one of these ideas is being implemented or experimented with by at least one program in the country.

1. **Community Interaction.** First let us remember that interaction with our community is a **two-way street** – the establishment of programs which not only require our students to go *out* into the community for some practical experiences but also bringing that community *inside* the classroom as well. Many untapped resources in communities are available to us in a time of shrinking budgets, and they do not all cost money. One example is to take advantage of the availability of senior citizens, those many people out there who are now retired and who have expertise which they would very much like to apply in some way either for our students in a community setting or with them in the classroom.

2. **Partnership with Business.** Another way of involving the community that is a more formal arrangement is a partnership with the business community. A formal partnership with the business community operates differently in a large city and a rural area. The City of Boston has had a formal operation of a partnership between the business community and its public school system for several years. In those cities where there has been a formal partnership between the business community and the schools, the two-way street has been based on the concept that *good education is also good business*. There must be something to be gained by both parties when you have a partnership. Now, it is obvious that educators need their resources – not only their

people but perhaps some of their buildings and some of their expertise. But the business community, usually through a Board of Trade or a Chamber of Commerce, can be approached to establish some relationship where businesses will permit some of their employees to volunteer (on company time) to assist in the post-secondary program *at* the college itself. They will also sometimes permit the giving of some funds from the company for a tax write-off to assist a struggling program of education. There are a variety of ways in which this partnership can happen, and the advantage to the business community is that this activity projects a positive image for business also.

In our field of education of deaf persons, we have an advantage that regular school systems do not have – a unique focus on a "handicapped" population. The appeal to the business community of doing something constructive and positive for a handicapped population is something that we can also use to the advantage of our students if it is done correctly. A number of our programs are concerned with how to prepare the work environment to receive our graduates when our graduates may be the first-ever wave of hearing-impaired adults who are trying to get a job in that segment of the hearing world.

3. **Employment Preparation.** A person who works for the federal government in the Rehabilitation Administration area was asked the question, "Why does it continue to be so tough for a hearing-impaired adult to get a job in a mainstream environment?" His reply was that the difficulty of achieving acceptance by hearing employees and the need to orient hearing people on the job (including the boss) to deafness is important but not the main problem.

He pointed out that the real problem is related to the *fear* of that employer about what will happen to the employer if for some *good reason*, that hearing-impaired person does not succeed (for some reason other than hearing-impairment) – the concern that a litigious situation will develop if the employer must fire a hearing-impaired person. Therefore, we must include in our employer education programs the reassurance that the same standards of job expectations and deployment can apply to any person who is hired, including a graduate of our programs. Many employers will not see real barriers if they can be reassured about that legal concern and obtain some basic educational and information orientation for them-

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selves and for their other hearing workers.

4. Life-Long Learning Centers. The concept of *life-long learning centers* is not new. We must continue as we think about curriculum to consider not only serving people who are 21-24 years old, but also to broaden our efforts to attract those people to adult programs, not just, e.g., for "tax seminars," but also the whole area of enrichment courses in adult education.

5. Cognitive Education. Let us return to the incorporation of generic cognitive skill training within the regular curriculum – a venture that requires faculty development. One of the largest challenges in incorporating cognitive skills is to enable the instructor to accept the idea that some focus on those skills (after some training for him/her self) is not an *interference* but will help that instructor to reach his curriculum goals better. The research data on this topic are very clear. The case for cognitive skills instruction really rests on the idea of not just improving achievement in a particular subject but improving the capacity for learning life-long.

6. Alternative Forms of Assessment. Now consider the problem of student assessment; state after state has developed the expectation that our students have to pass the same paper-and-pencil tests, and they are having the expected problems with them. Our strategy must be the immediate development and use of *multiple* methods of evaluation of achievement. Paper-and-pencil tests only tell part of the story. With appropriate faculty development and with some "hard-selling" with the people who make the decisions at the state level, we can join hands with other educators and examine the values of such assessment methods as the structured interview, the structured careful observation, and student written responses analyzing a posed problem – all as alternative means of valid assessment. What do we do as professionals? One, experiment to demonstrate the validity of those other methodologies within our own programs. Second, work at showing and sharing that evidence with people in state departments of education who are making decisions or recommendations to legislatures or boards about criteria for evaluation.

7. Post-Secondary Centers. The report of the National Commission on Education for the Deaf is now in print. One provision in that report calls for the establishment of ten post-secondary education centers around the country. If Congress approves any money to make that concept

a reality even on a small scale, we must immediately jump on the "bandwagon" *together* to make written grant proposals so as to put us in a situation of working in a complementary fashion. Even if the Congress does not appropriate funding for this concept, we ought to develop proposals to lead to such cooperation.

8. Staff and Faculty Development. In seeking to change methods of teaching or materials of teaching, we need various incentive programs that can make professional growth happen. There can be no curriculum change without teacher change, and the best and most lasting teacher changes are based on an "osmosis" approach – that well used strategy of identifying those faculty members who are the most interested in a new approach, giving them that opportunity, and letting them "run" with an idea; some others will then want to join the effort soon afterward. A particular philosophy of faculty development is needed here – going beyond the idea of giving the member of the faculty just new technology to do something new, and instead making the faculty member a learner himself/herself. If we are asking faculty members to incorporate methodologies and materials that they have not experienced themselves as learners, then they must first experience, and then focus on implementing that skill with their own learners.

9. Multiple Program Options. The final approach is the establishment of multiple options for students, which we are already doing in many of our programs. Multiple options are not only *program choices*, but they are also as much as possible designed to recognize differences in students' *learning styles*; students in every institution must be able to select from a variety of choices.

Conclusion

Lowell (1987) listed six characteristics of a quality post-secondary program.

Three of those six were: sufficient funding, appropriate support services, and a student body which has agreed to make a commitment. But his other three characteristics are more directly relevant to our discussion here. Number four is a fully qualified faculty, including a responsibility for helping faculty to stay up-to-date and facilitating that process through faculty development. Number five, he underlines the use of current technologies; it is important for us to be up-to-date ourselves, but the world that our students

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are going to face next year or next month when they take a job, is also going to be filled with that technology. The sixth characteristic relates to complementarity of programming—having enough students to make a meaningful group which is also cost-effective, or the concept of the critical mass. We must have enough students to have enriched interaction in the classroom.

The area of network development is also useful to remember because we need to formalize some existing networks and form new ones for mutual benefit. Such networks can be informal on an individual basis, and also formal through contractual relationships among different institu-

tions in regional consortia.

Not all of these ideas are practical or usable tomorrow, or next week, or even next year, but we must all accept the charge that the initiative is ours to take if we are willing to do so. Ours is an era of increasing scarcity of resources for post-secondary education of hearing-impaired persons, but if we act appropriately, we can find some “good news” and build upon it. With the use of the clever strategies that leaders in our field already have been using, we can face this challenge and can win out over the barriers that are very clearly with us for perhaps a long time ahead.

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