

Some remarks occasioned by Dr. Jevon's paper concerning courses and teaching methods at Deakin.

I. I am very much in agreement about the benefits of using a quasi Open University "team approach" in devising courses and materials for on and off campus students. In my view willingness to participate in a team approach should be a prime criterion in the selection of academic staff.

At the same time one must be realistic about the difficulties attending interdisciplinary teaching and learning. From experience with interdisciplinary projects at the University of Melbourne, I would say that it is not easy to re-educate academics who have been formed and nurtured in traditional disciplines, so that they are really willing and able to engage in authentic interdisciplinary thinking and research instead of superficial interdisciplinary chit-chat. Referring to attempts at Sussex University to promote ecumenical contacts between arts and science students, an undergraduate has this to say: "The possibility of breaking down, in one seminar per week, years of accumulated traditions of separateness that the older universities, and particularly the schools, have helped to create and sustain is very remote.... What is needed ultimately, and I think it must come, is the establishment of joint projects where scientists and arts students must work together, although doing different and quite precisely defined jobs, in a concrete partnership. It is unrealistic in any venture to stress intellectual exchange and minimize practical work-sharing". (Granville Hawkins, "From the Cage: An Undergraduate

View" in The Idea of a New University, p.195). What is said about students here goes also for academics: in other words, what is needed is the establishment of joint projects where scholars from different disciplines work together in a concrete partnership.

Again, as Dr. Jevons notes (p.3.), students themselves are often academic Tories and they do not all welcome an interdisciplinary approach to university studies since interdisciplinary courses are inevitably less definitely structured, and so more difficult to "swot", than traditionally framed courses. Nevertheless, if we can encourage both staff and students to approach the interdisciplinary or team method in a Popperian spirit, I am sure that it will prove its value.

2. If Deakin is to have a major commitment to off-campus students it is important that we take note of certain peculiarities of the extra-mural clientele, very different I think from extra-mural students in England. No doubt many of the off-campus students will come from Melbourne, but a significant number will also come from country centres in Victoria and we need to have an appreciation of the quality of "intellectual life" in Victorian country towns. Having been born in a Victorian country town I am inclined to endorse the brutal judgment of an adult education student in Wangaratta that, as he put it to me, most country centres (there are a few shining exceptions) are "intellectual Siberias". Libraries and other facilities are usually very poor; there is a tendency to look to Melbourne for theatre and music and the arts; there is a constant bleeding of young people, and of what intelligensia there is, to Melbourne; there is the factor of distance and isolation which places limitations upon visiting lecturers and tutors.

In my view it is important for those who are to devise courses and material for off-campus students to see and experience at first hand what Victorian country centres are like. I have been impressed recently by an article by J.P. Power on the University of Papua New Guinea ("The Rise and Fall of U.P.N.G.", in Vestes, vol.XVIII, No.2, 1975). Power criticises the U.P.N.G. academic staff's ignorance of the community from which their students come and what he says here about the University of Papua New Guinea can be applied mutatis mutandis to our situation at Deakin.

1. U.P.N.G. has always been and remains almost totally isolated from the rest of the country and from the mass of its people. This had its origins in the decision to locate the University in Port Moresby but very little has been done to overcome the handicap of geography and to develop fruitful working relationships with some of the scattered and remote communities of Papua New Guinea. Some staff serve out their contracts and return home without ever leaving Port Moresby; many of those who do leave the campus spend a few days away in a hotel without ever seeing a village, except from the air, and without ever speaking to a single member of the great mass of the population which inhabits the rural areas. Such people know virtually nothing of Papua New Guinea and its people, have no real grasp of the problems of development and the ways in which the University might contribute to the solution of these, and have little understanding of the background of their students and the difficulties which this creates for them at the University.
2. It is partly as a consequence of this isolation that the University, with the exception of a handful of staff and students, has failed to involve itself in the complex and challenging tasks of rural development to which it is uniquely qualified to contribute in view of the intellectual and human resources at its disposal. The village people, who would be justified in expecting some help from the University and its students, are still waiting in vain for assistance.

As a practical suggestion then, I would like to see those engaged in devising material spending some time in country centres (e.g. Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Benalla, Sale, Warrnambool, Hamilton) in order to get the feel of country students' special needs and expectations, etc. Consultation with Mr. Colin

Cave of the Council of Adult Education, and Mr. Peter Grayson and Ms. Gael Shannon of the Office of Continuing Education at the University of Melbourne, would also be very helpful.

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