

Fall 2017 Inservice Remarks
August 14, 2017

Good morning, everyone. It seems like we were just here a few weeks ago. The summer has evaporated, and the years just keep clicking by, and except for a couple of these I missed along the way, this is my 30th fall in-service. I don't know if that's why, exactly, but I've been reflecting a lot the past months on how *things* have changed but mostly how *I've* changed. I'm still about the same height, but outside of that I can say that I've ... grown ... in more ways than one. After all these years, my perspective has changed, my attitudes have changed, my philosophy of education has changed, and that's interesting to me because all of *those* things I felt were sort of a foundation of thought for me. But the more I've learned (as Don Henley says), the less I understand. Or at the very least, I've become more open minded as I've discovered that some of my notions, were just that: notions and opinions. I wouldn't say I'm a seeker of truth so much as an accidental discoverer.

Quite a few of you out there are working on dissertations in your pursuit of the *pinnacle* of the higher education experience: the doctoral degree. I believe that the further a doctoral candidate moves towards the finish line to defend their research, the more humble they become. Because that process is as much about self-discovery as it is changing the world. My own dissertation experience is a great example of how we (or at least I) sometimes believe in an elusive truth, perhaps because the other side of the coin is an inconvenient truth. I'd like to tell you about that experience.

My career in technical education had instilled in me many notions and beliefs about how things *are* or *should* be. I selected a dissertation topic that I felt would validate some of those beliefs. The title speaks for itself: *Process and influence: A*

phenomenological multiple case study of the career decision making of community college students. My premise was that unless and until a young person knows what career they will be pursuing, that they should not be wasting their time, energy, attention, and parents' money on college. I was convinced at the time that this was higher education in its purest form: occupation-specific education, without all the frills and bells and whistles; all that general education, liberal arts nonsense. I had read a book by Diane Ravitch entitled *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*, and it completely rankled me and many of my colleagues. It wasn't history at all: it was a treatise on the power of a *liberal* education. So I set out to settle this once and for all.

Along I went with my dissertation study, reading the literature, learning a great deal, and interviewing my participants. But when I started to write the final chapter, I felt empty. My personal theories and notions had largely been wrong. My conclusions were these: 1) the career decision is a minor one in comparison to the larger questions of what kind of person, worker, parent, spouse, or citizen we decide to be; 2) college is a *great* place for a young person to explore the world of ideas and participate in self-discovery that might lead them to answer those more "important" questions, and; 3) higher education is about building *people*, not just workers. While we may be directly preparing someone for their first job, what we need to be preparing them for is not only about career, but about *thriving*. My own notions had blinded me, even while I claimed to subscribe to the educational philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King. You've likely read or heard this before, maybe from me. Dr. King wrote *this in 1947*:

*It seems to me that education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: **the one is utility and the other is culture.** Education must enable a man to become more efficient, to*

achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life. ... The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate.

We do a great job here of preparing people for work in specific occupations, it's one of the best things about us. In fact, just two weeks ago Kara Mahannah and our Medical Assisting program was recognized as the best CTE program in Idaho. Nice job! That's why some of our students come to us. But not everyone. *Most* of what we do is something else. 82% of our degree seeking headcount is for transfer degree purposes. This is one of those topics upon which I've been ruminating. But I've had to grapple with some other notions. *Who* are our students and *why are they here?* What are they intending to do? Are we *listening* to them?

For years, we've deployed everyone's favorite survey, the CCSSE or *Community College Survey of Student Engagement*, along with its counterpart, SENSE, or the *Survey of Entering Student Engagement*. You'll notice the two key words they have in common: "student" and "engagement." Must be important to engage students.

I was a bit startled in the last couple years to learn that students have been telling us something for awhile now: that while they may be interested in a bachelor's degree, they aren't necessarily planning to leave the area. And many don't. Most CTE program completers end up working in Region IV, and many, many, many more transfer or academic students stay here rather than transfer and finish their degrees elsewhere. Over the space of the past ten years or so, **less than 2% of our transfer majors eventually went on to earn a bachelor's degree.** Of our transfer majors that *did* complete here at CSI, it gets a *little* better: over half of them did take classes after CSI, but still only 15% of *them* finished a bachelor's degree. Our Liberal Arts degree has the largest population and some of the best metrics: in ten years we issued

almost 2,000 of these degrees and over half of those grads went on to a baccalaureate program. Of those, more than half (574) finished a bachelor's degree, but only 19 of them (about 3%) got a degree in Liberal Arts: they found something else to do. So we average about 57 liberal arts completers a year that go on to get a bachelor's degree. 57 out of about 4,800 transfer students a year on average. I won't go into the arguably microscopic numbers of graduates and transfers in most of our majors. But I will say this: the majors with the highest transfer volume and bachelor's completion rates are Education, Registered Nursing, Business, and Criminal Justice. These are all programs that can be completed right here in Twin Falls. Our students are apparently more placebound than we think.

Vast numbers of our students transferring and completing a bachelor's degree is simply a notion, it is not our reality. There is no basis in fact. And so, as I've said, I've been thinking. What does that *mean* for us? *Do you have notions that just aren't true?* Do you know who our students are? What are they telling *you*? What are we doing for them? They aren't leaving here...so what *should* we give them here?

I have a hunch that some of our CTE faculty are thinking the answer to that question is, "*A new major.*" And for *some*, that probably does make sense. But we can also give them a great experience. Self-discovery. The best program of *general* education available. Linkage between the various ways of knowing, and ways of being. How to thrive. How to learn. My dissertation studies clearly demonstrated to me the value in the development of self-efficacy in our students. Building confidence without watering things down. I believe that what you as a faculty body have built as a general education program has the potential to significantly alter not only the lives of our students, but your lives as well. It already is. I've been told that Cal-Berkeley is asking about this GNED101 course.

It's a fine thing...and we're just getting started. And keep in mind: *this is **most** of what we do here.* You'll hear more about this program of general education on Wednesday from Whitney Smith-Schuler and others.

We learn more about our students every day. They are an interesting bunch, that's for sure. And once we get them, we need to get to know them, engage them, and hang onto them. Let's give them all those things that may help them discover more about themselves, including what a force they can be. We owe it to them to give them everything we can. After all, they *are* paying us.

Thank you for your attention this morning.