A SOUND GOAL

The report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education clearly articulated a goal for American education:

"...that all children, by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself." (page 4)

A FLAWED STRATEGY

The Commission then, however, lost sight of its own goal as it prepared its plan for ensuring quality in American education.

- The report does not address its original goal of education to improve quality of life; instead, it focuses more on beating the competition in high technology.
- It virtually ignores the primary players, the students, as it focuses on teaching rather than learning.
- Finally, it ignores the large body of research about how and why individuals learn; how they develop cognitively, morally, and socially; and how they differ among themselves. Instead, it makes recommendations for more homework and longer days for everyone.

TOWARD A BETTER STRATEGY

Accepting the Commission's goal, there is a need to look again at how we are educating. Quality in education is not primarily a matter of such things as time spent in class, of subject matter covered, or of teacher compensation. Among the crucial factors in learning are strength of motivation, appropriateness of learning resources to the learning tasks, choice of strategies of inquiry, and the climate of the learning environments. If a genuine, lasting, pervasive change for the better in American schooling is to be achieved, it will have to grow out of more thoughtful attention to these crucial factors.

Key among these factors are the learning environments. We believe that a major component of such learning environments must be opportunities
for not only abstract, but also experiential learning; that is, learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied rather than simply reading about, hearing about, or talking about these realities.

The experiential approach is a powerful motivator for learning:

- It is success-oriented, involving real-life problem solving.
- Feedback is uncontrived and immediate.
- Results are real-life consequences.
- The learners participate in the design, implementation, and management of their own learning: they become invested in the goal and in the means, hence internally motivated.

In addition, by providing for integration of ideas and actions in activity in the larger community, experiential learning facilitates the transition to adulthood and develops skills for responsible citizenship.

Since our goal is to prepare an enlightened citizenry to lead productive and purposeful lives and to contribute to the productivity of the economy and the quality of community life, we must ensure that they learn how to learn, how to grow and adjust to change.

A Joint Statement of the:

Association for Experiential Education (AEE)
Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL)
National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE)