

Prologue

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This collection of essays by Lesley University faculty in recognition of Lesley's Centennial offers an historic perspective, not just about Lesley but about American higher education over these past one hundred years. When Edith Lesley began to train kindergarten teachers, she could not have envisioned the growth of her school from the initial twelve students in the fall of 1909 to the 6,000 students enrolled in the fall of 2009. She also could not have predicted the various influences that would change American higher education—and Lesley—over the 20th Century.

In reading these essays you will recognize some of the major changes in American education over these hundred years: the growing influence of the state and federal government in funding and regulating K-12 education and higher education; the expanding role of women in education; the efforts to make education more inclusive through the expansion of compulsory attendance policies; the civil rights movement; the passage of state and national special education legislation; and the growth in the number of adult learners. You will also see how various historical events and eras (e.g. World War II, Sputnik, the Vietnam War, and the conservatism of the Reagan years) influenced education programs and institutions.

These essays, however, are more than historical reflections. Higher education is highly regarded and often criticized for its pre-occupation with language, verbal and written. From admissions materials to course readings, from course syllabi to degree requirements, from faculty scholarship to student publications, from institutional policies to accreditation reports, and from lectures to commencement speakers, higher education is an enterprise driven by words. But these essays are different from standard higher education documentation.

They are different because the authors had an unusual freedom to describe how programs at Lesley were developed, drawing on the historical context, but also identifying and describing the real people who inhabit, influence, and make history. In these essays we read about those faculty, administrators, and students who acted to create something new, to connect the institutional mission with a social trend or challenge. Some might call it an entrepreneurial spirit. However, it's more than that at Lesley. Today we call it "making a difference," coordinating the academic resources of a private institution to yield a public benefit.

In addition to capturing some of the history of American higher education and the development of Lesley University, the authors describe key themes and tensions that some might think are new issues. Most are not. In these essays we witness the tension between teaching the "whole student" versus a pedagogy focused on the transmission of skills and facts, whether this is kindergarten student or a graduate student. We can read Edith Lesley's own words reflecting her concerns about the bureaucratization of Lesley when it officially became a college, introducing anxiety about institutional size and personal relationships. We read in numerous essays about the positive and negative influence of state and federal policies on teaching and

learning, from federal funding following Sputnik, to the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, to No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

We also witness through these program descriptions vivid accounts about the importance of the imagination, student-centered learning, the arts and creativity, and the importance of free play. This particular influence, beginning with Edith Lesley and Friedrich Froebel, remains a driving and unifying force at Lesley. The notion of student engagement, of a pedagogy that places each student at the center of the learning experience, is a challenge addressed in each of these essays, whether it is about the liberal arts at Lesley College, the curriculum at the Art Institute of Boston, or the goals of the Threshold Program. It is clear that the faculty not only talk about student engagement, but that they plan it, expect it, and stimulate it. It is our legacy.

You will also find in these essays many references to the implicit and explicit goals of higher education. You will learn about faculty scholarship and contributions to their particular academic fields; public service initiatives and events that extend Lesley's reach into various parts of local, regional, national, and international communities; and the history of Lesley as a sequence of new program developments.

All of these activities serve our primary mission: the engagement of our students and the success of Lesley graduates. In the current pre-occupation with a perverse form of educational accountability that reduces educational impact to standardized test scores, we can easily forget the more complex, comprehensive, and humane aspirations that drew most of us into education. It is these aspirations that are captured in the following essays by the frequent use of the word "holistic," by the thoughtful student-centered program designs, by the development of meaningful "field placements," and by the continuing reflection about the most appropriate teacher/student relationship. The Lesley student remains at the center of any discussion about program planning, resource allocation, or facilities' improvements.

This focus on student learning began with Edith Lesley's concern about a five-year-old using her imagination, playing, pretending, making art, hearing and telling stories, and learning to interact with other five-year-olds. These children needed teachers who could put the young child in center of the teacher's thoughts, plans and energies. In these faculty essays, that same focus on the learner is revealed time and time again. Our primary commitment is always to the student. It is a legacy that we will sustain, especially when particular political periods frown upon it.

There is one final word about these essays: generosity. The authors identify faculty and administrators, and occasionally students and people beyond Lesley, who were instrumental in developing a program. In almost every case there are leaders, but one of the attributes of Lesley is a belief in the creativity of the collective and these essays reflect that. An effective education in general, and at Lesley in particular, is always a cooperative venture.