

THINKING OTHERWISE

There is an old German saying that
Carl Becker, the distinguished professor of history at Cornell University,
once defined a professor as "a person who thinks otherwise." Thus as the faculty
contributor to this orientation program, I thought it might be appropriate to
spend the next ¹⁵ ~~twenty~~ minutes or so "thinking otherwise" about ^{some of the emerging issues} the ~~common wisdom~~
and ~~common practices~~ in education.

If you read what the popular press has to say about education today, you think
that education is a profession in deep trouble, that it attracts people who are *at best*
mediocre, ~~at best~~, and that the reason Johnny can't read is that teachers can't teach.
If you read the professional journals, you think that the task for educators for
the next decade, ~~or until the baby boom echo arrives~~, is to manage decline, to
develop market strategies, and to reallocate ^{existing} resources. If you read the rash of
special commission reports that have come out in the past six months, you think that
the cure for education lies in returning standards to the schools, pursuing excellence,
and making education a quality product once again.

I am not going to argue that the profession is in fine shape, nor am I going
to come out against excellence or efficient management, but I would like to hold
each one of today's themes about education up for examination, and I want to reserve
the right to "think otherwise" about ^{it} ~~how we are dealing with them~~.

First, there's ¹⁵ the popular conception that education is a declining industry,
that business and law are more glamorous professions, especially for women, and that
budding historians should forget about academe and think of nine creative ways to
sell their services to industry. A close look at what is actually happening in
education will lead us to think otherwise.

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Education, in the broad meaning of that term is a growing rather than a declining industry. There are more people involved in teaching and learning than ever before in history, and education has burst beyond the ^{confines} boundaries of schools and colleges to pervade most of the organizations of society. More than ^{21 million} adults are ^{participating in} enrolled ^{various forms of adult ed.} in ~~classes or attending workshops and seminars~~, but ^{schools + colleges} the traditional educational institutions of our society provide less than half of all organized instruction for adults. The remainder is provided by industry, the military services, labor unions and professional associations, and community organizations. Industry, for example, spends more on the education and training of its employees than all states put together allocate for higher education, ^{on any given day at AT&T, there are 30,000} and the membership roles of the American Society for ^{employees taking a course in one of 120 learning centers. A staff of 10,000} Training Directors from 20,000 to more than 40,000 over the past ten years. Last year in the state of California, where the populace is already among the best educated in the nation, 42 percent of the adults were taking classes or attending institutes or workshops. As the formal educational attainment of the populace rises, so will the participation in education because ^{applied} a college graduate is roughly seven times as likely to be engaged in adult education as a high school dropout; and ^{people with graduate} adults in the ^{degrees} professions are the most active learners of all. When large numbers of society's people are engaged in ~~lifelong~~ ^{teaching, then} learning, and large numbers of society's organizations are involved in ~~instructional activities~~, the Learning Society has arrived, and only a parochial perspective could contend that education is a declining profession.

Since most of you, however, probably anticipate spending most of your career ^{the} in formal educational institutions of schools and colleges, what is the future for professional educators there? Clearly, the national interest in education has ^{and it} bottomed out and education is on the upswing, promising ^{es} to become a major campaign issue. Presidential candidates are vying with one another ^{to see} for who can give the most

attention to educational issues, ^{and} (~~John Glen on David Brinkly, July 31, 1983 "Education and research will make or break us in international competition".~~) Governors are in hot competition with one another to move their state into the high technology economy through the development of human capital via education. *while there is none →*

Having established the viability of education as a profession, I want to think otherwise now about what we are doing with it. Most people would probably agree that what many educational administrators are trying to do is to maintain the quality of education ^{while spending} on less money, by improving efficiency. That ^{usually concentrating on} means curtailing innovation, cutting out fat and waste ^{Qe} and improving the internal processes of the organization.

Research suggests that to most administrators, it also means becoming more conservative, ^{curtailing innovation,} enforcing rules more closely, ^{ing} trying to reallocate resources that are perceived as constant or declining, and, in general, ^{keeping a low profile and playing}

Administrators today are working hard at managing efficiently; they appear to be it safe (Cameron, 1983). ^{The conclusion is that administrators are emphasizing} ~~not~~ ^{less concerned about} ~~directional effectiveness.~~ efficiency, at the cost, however, of effectiveness. There is an easy distinction ^{efficiency + effectiveness that has worked its way into the literature.} between the two. Efficiency consists of "doing things right" while effectiveness is "doing the right things." It is far easier to master the techniques for doing things right than it is to gain the understandings, the timing, and the leadership for doing the right things. That is, I think, why we in education have been so enthralled with management techniques, often at the cost of struggling with the more difficult questions of educational effectiveness. It comes as no surprise that

threatened administrators are more concerned about how to survive than why they should.

Survival is important, but both research + experience suggest that Yet research carried out with 40 colleges in the northeastern region of the United States found *few exist will survive than better maint.* that focusing on improving the efficiency of internal management was *Survival it seems depends more on doing the right things than on doing things right. One recent study reported* characteristic of institutions which had lost enrollment each year for the past six ^{that} years, ^{colleges} whereas growing institutions had turned their attention outward to interaction ^{that}

at least to those threatened with extinction,

with constituencies through public relations and public service (Cameron, 1983). *It appears that under conditions of decline, it's hard to deconstruct the*
 Doing the right things, it turns out, is more important than doing things right -- *entrepreneurial interventions that would define the educational mission & even when the criterion is the simple one of increasing student enrollment.*
constituents.

In your year or years at Harvard, we hope you will be learning both how to "do things right" and how "to do the right things." The latter will be far more difficult.

But education, I hope, is about ready to come back to its own discipline. There

-- indeed I will be citing some of those lessons later --
 is much that educators can learn from the graduate schools of business, but we cannot learn how to do the right things ^{for education} from them. We cannot learn what curriculum will meet the needs of students now and in the future information society. They cannot teach us how to develop the instructional methods that will deal with growing diversity in the classroom. We will have to do our own research on learning styles and cognitive development. Educators have been too eager to manage and too hesitant to lead. We will need educational leaders in the years to come, and I hope that *in entering the Ed School, you are committing yourselves to*
 pursuing knowledge and understanding of educational issues *that will equip you to lead, as well as to manage.*
 of priorities.

Finally, I should like to "think otherwise" about current approaches to excellence. I think it is fair to characterize ^{recent rash of} the reports and recommendations ^{from blue-ribbon commissions} that have been issued over the past six months as reactions against permissiveness. The current drive toward excellence includes more externally imposed requirements, more rigor and objectivity, more competition, and more careful monitoring and consistent enforcement of standards. The tone of the report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, for example, is definitely tough-minded, and quality control -- of teachers, students, and publishers -- is a pervasive theme throughout the recommendations and implementation strategies. The report, while controversial in some

specifics, seems to have tapped a wellspring of feeling nationwide that excellence is the opposite of permissiveness and that tough standards and more rigorous enforcement will bring excellence back to the schools.

At the same time that ^{educational excellence} "a national risk" is receiving ^{justifiable} considerable attention ^{in educ} from the press, a book entitled "In Search of Excellence" has become a national best-seller. The book is a study of corporate excellence. The authors, through a series of visits and interviews, describe the characteristics of the most successful companies in America. They call them "excellent companies."

The tone of this book is markedly different in feeling from that of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. ^{The researchers concluded that there was no more persuasive theme in} Perhaps the overriding thesis is that excellent companies ^{show} demonstrate trust and respect for individuals, be they customers, salesmen, or creative geniuses. Excellent companies seem to be able to create an environment in which individual motivation, initiative, and creativity will flourish. That environment is frequently informal, flexible, intense, and sometimes chaotic. "One of the main clues to corporate excellence," say the authors, "is unusual effort on the part of apparently ordinary employees" (Peterson and Waterman, 1982, p. xvii).

That, I assume, is a universal definition of excellence ^{holder} in companies, schools, colleges, ^{or} government, ~~or any other people-populated organization~~. What we want in schools and colleges is "unusual effort" on the part of "apparently ordinary" administrators, teachers, and students. The question is how to get it. The formula ^{from} of Nation at Risk is ^{to} get tough; create ^{rigorous standards} the structures that defines the goals of excellence and make sure that everyone meets ^{them} those standards. The formula ^{lesson} from In Search of Excellence is ^{to "turn the average Joe and the average Jane into winners. [Excellent companies]} a philosophy that says, in effect, respect the individual, and ^{everyone a} "make people winners."

Maybe either approach will work; I don't know, ^{maybe bits of both are needed.} but it seems to me that making everyone a winner is especially appropriate in education. Indeed, I can think of no

better definition for an excellent school or college than one in which everyone is a winner at the business of learning.

In Search of Excellence is especially compelling, I think, in discussing the development and reward of winners. They point out that, "All of us are self-centered, suckers for a bit of praise, and generally like to think of ourselves as winners. But the fact of the matter is that our talents are distributed normally -- none of us is really as good as he or she would like to think, but rubbing our noses daily in that reality doesn't do us a bit of good" (p. 55). They go on to say that, "The lesson that the excellent companies have to teach is that there is no reason why we can't design systems that continually reinforce this notion; most of their people are made to feel that they are winners" (p. 57). How do they do this? Well, at IBM, sales quotas are set so that 70 to 80 percent of its salespeople meet quotas. ^{A less successful} ~~Another~~ company sets quotas so that only 40 percent of the sales force meets the quota. "With this approach," say the researchers, "at least 60 percent as the sales people think of themselves as losers. They resent it, and that leads to dysfunctional, unpredictable, frenetic behavior. Label a man a loser and he'll start acting like one" (p. 57).

We have developed structures in education that make everyone a winner. With mastery learning and competency-based education, to mention but two, everyone can win and everyone can meet high standards of achievement. ~~because the structure is designed to accomplish that.~~ Shouldn't we be moving ahead toward excellence, ^{by} basing our strategies on what we have learned through research and experimentation in education?

^{INSERT 6}
Thinking otherwise is usually hard work, but finding answers to your own questions will be among your richest rewards at Harvard. Students may tell you that "thinking otherwise" is the privilage of the faculty, and that agreement with the professor is more likely to make you a winner. ~~Naturally~~, I think otherwise. Most

INSERT 6

Another lesson that we ~~have learned through~~
^{that we learn or we forget or forgetting}
~~research~~ is that positive reinforcement is more effective
than negative. It is especially important in education
because reward shapes behavior + teaches in the
process. To know that you are doing something right
helps you know what to do again; to know that you
are doing something wrong tells you what to avoid, but
not how to do it right.

We need a more positive & joyous approach to
excellence than I see in most of the current
recommendations, which tend to concentrate on discipline,
hard work, longer hours, & more requirements. Hard work &
discipline are inevitably necessary for excellence, but they
are rarely sufficient.

^{of the formula for excellence proposed by the Commission on Training}
It seems to me that some ^{to recapture the}
excellence of an earlier & quite dissimilar era,
ignoring what we have learned over the past 2 decades
about learning & learning.

of your teachers will welcome a student who is seriously questioning the common wisdom, ~~even if it is ^{their} own~~. But my friendly piece of advice is that you should start with the "thinking" and see if it leads you to the "otherwise."

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