

ON LEADERSHIP AND THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Several years ago, Arthur Levine (1981) wrote a book for the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education describing this generation of college students. He titled it When Dreams and Heroes Died, and observed that today's students are cynical, distrustful, acquisitive, and primarily concerned about "looking out for Number One" -- a cluster of attitudes that Levine labels "meism." As I reread Levine's unflattering description of today's students recently, I could not help thinking that what students see around them in our colleges and universities is widespread meism in institutional forms. Our institutions today are without dreams, without heroes, distrustful of everything and everyone, from state legislatures and Reaganomics to tenured faculty members who are blocking the rise of younger colleagues and departments that are hanging on, using funds coveted by others. Meism, says Levine, separates people. "In the extreme, it robs them of their ability to see common problems and to work together for common solutions. The problems grow worse, and people feel victimized, coming to view their problems as a form of personal harassment. The feeling of impotence rises, and

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apathy increases" (p. xviii).

The literature of higher education has been dominated for the past five years by the survival theme. Community colleges are supposed to weather the coming depression better than most colleges, but that may be slight comfort to you as you face some of the most difficult problems ever to confront California community colleges. Most of your problems spring from the economy, but as we are beginning to see, the economy can turn around faster than institutions mired in depression can change the attitudes that have been building in higher education.

Although I had originally planned to talk about alternative retrenchment strategies that could be used by community colleges in distress, the more I thought about it and the more I read outside the literature of higher education, the less I believed that community colleges should retrench by doing anything that cannot be reversed when the economy turns around. And so I want to talk about the changing role of education in the society of the future and to urge educators everywhere to get the message across to the governor, legislature, and the American public that education will be extremely important in this decade to the economy of the state and the nation. To take any steps in this crisis that could do permanent harm will be self defeating. What educators can do about that is to reassert strong leadership.

We don't hear much about leadership in education these days. Instead colleges are headed by managers and strategic planners. Perhaps I have not been persuaded by the new definitions purporting to make management something more glamorous than maintaining prudent control over institutions whose directions are predetermined. Today's educational managers attend conferences on management skills at which they are helped to develop all the skills of the sea captain trying to maintain a calm and orderly evacuation of his sinking ship.

Strategic planners go managers one better in that they analyze why the ship is sinking and take into account both the storms of the external world and the leakiness of their vessels. While it is clear to me that strategic planning, with its emphasis on events in the external world, is a far superior recipe for survival over the isolation of the ivory tower, it is not clear to me that strategic planners see beyond the next battle. The military metaphor is not lost on today's strategic planners. An article in this fall's AAHE Bulletin, (Baldrige and Okimi, 1982, p. 16) describes strategic planning in these words:

The military unit going into battle has its master plan. But its real success will rest on adequate response to changing conditions, on flexibility in meeting new demands, and on internal strength that allows rapid redeployment. As every good military commander knows, no matter how carefully the plans have been made, the actual battle will take a different turn

So a strong battle commander builds a response capacity. Troops are deployed with heavy elements of redundancy so extra strength is available for every move. Complex efforts are undertaken to scan the environment: intelligence ferrets out enemy movements, reconnaissance seeks to know where plans have gone astray and by how much. Communications are structured so the commander can monitor situations and deploy forces for new moves that were not in the old plan. Contingency plans provide alternatives when the original master plan fouls up.

The battlefield, in short, requires a different mind set and a new set of behaviors (p. 16).

The authors wrap up their military analogy by concluding that, "Our argument is that the leaders of American higher education must learn to think more like the battlefield commander and less like the desk-top planner back at headquarters" (p. 16).

The problem I seen in the mindset of the battlefield commander is that each battle is all consuming. Beyond the current battle looms the next one, and the demand for the quick maneuver leaves no time for contemplation about the purpose of the war. Do we know who the enemy of education is and what we will have won when we

defeat him? Where have all the leaders gone? Who has dreams of education worth fighting for? Is Martin Luther King's dream dead? Has the dream of educational equality with its call for trust and faith given way to the grim battle for excellence with its emphasis on pruning out weak programs and weak people?

Let me be clear that excellence in higher education is well worth fighting for, but it is the mindset of today's battlefield commanders that I am questioning. Excellence requires above all else high morale, commitment, and a clear vision of the goal. Although the rhetoric of strategic planning calls for attention to institutional destiny, it is hard to maintain a vision of the goal when the technique of strategic planning focuses on developing "response capacity" and capitalizing on opportunity.

There is, I believe, a fundamental difference in the stance of an institution that is open admissions by commitment and one that is open admissions for the sake of survival. Faculty committed to the ideology of open admissions derive their professional satisfaction from doing something that they think is important beyond themselves and their institution. They see meaning and challenge in teaching people who are hard to teach. For faculty who accept open admissions for survival's sake, there is little commitment, a lot of frustration, and not much satisfaction in teaching open admissions students.

There is, I think, a fundamental difference between an institution committed to serving the lifelong learning needs of the adults

in their community and one scanning the external environment for marketing opportunities. Ed Gleazer's vision (1980) of a college in intimate relationship with its community is not, according to some critics, a marketable reality, but it is a total concept of what Gleazer thinks a college should be. It is a vision that has coherence and integrity and that shapes college identity, instructional programs, governance and advisory boards, and hiring practices.

There is, I think, a basic difference between a college that believes in job training as a necessary and desirable obligation of postsecondary education to its society and one that believes that a college can be rescued from the "rampant vocationalism" of students by striking some reasonable compromises between the vocational interests of students and the academic interests of a discipline-based faculty. This is not to suggest that a faculty alert to the long-range futures of job-seekers should not press for broad-based vocational education, enriched by the liberal arts. It is to say that a commitment to a vision of liberal education beyond training is quite different from the political expediency of boosting enrollments in humanities courses.

What we need in education today is some happy blend of the visionary and the realist -- leaders who know both what they want and how to get it done, not just for themselves or their institutions, but for education and the world. That calls for vision first and technique second. We have it the other way around today. Workshops

on management, marketing, budgeting, and legal ramifications abound; there are few on mission, purpose, philosophy, and the world view of education. I want to swing the pendulum back from micro-education with its emphasis on institutional survival to macro-education with its emphasis on our common concerns as educators. In short, my remarks are related more to winning the war for education than to fighting its battles.

Winning the war requires looking ahead to see how education can serve society in an era of great change and transformation. There is widespread agreement now that we are facing a major revolution in society. It has been called The Third Wave, the Information Society, and the Technological Revolution. But whatever its nomenclature, the direction seems clear. The technological revolution with its rapid developments in communications and computer technology is replacing the industrial society with its emphasis on standardization and mass production. In fact, the revolution in technology is now so visible that the only debate left is whether we are in transition to radically changed lifestyles or whether we have already arrived in the new world. Alvin Toffler (1981), author of The Third Wave, contends that some of the distressing changes we see around us -- the collapse of the nuclear family, the ineffectiveness of political representation, the crisis in the schools -- are evidence that the underlying structures that held the industrial society together are coming to an end and that new structures are rising to take their place.

John Naisbitt, however, author of Megatrends (1982) believes that, "Although we continue to think we live in an industrial society, we have in fact changed to an economy based on the creation and distribution of information." In 1950, only 17 percent of the jobs in America involved the processing of information; today more than 60 percent of all workers are creating, processing, or distributing information. Of the 19 million new jobs created in the 1970s, almost 90 percent were information, knowledge, or service jobs; only 11 percent were in the goods producing sector.

Futurists such as Naisbitt and Toffler can beguile us with their rhetoric and statistics, but far more conservative voices are now being raised in support of the need for fundamental change in education to meet the needs of a society with its economy, jobs, and lifestyles based in the technological revolution. A critically important report just issued by the Office of Technology Assessment of the United States Congress concluded that "The so-called information revolution, driven by rapid advances in communications and computer technology, is profoundly affecting American education. It is changing the nature of what needs to be learned, who needs to learn it, who will provide it, and how it will be provided and paid for" (OTA, 1982, p. iii).

Let us pick up the challenge of the OTA report and look at the changes demanded of higher education, especially those concerning learners and providers.

Higher education is at its insular worst in its narrow perception of the adult learning "market." Many view adult learners as a convenient and fortuitous replacement for the potential college students that were not born eighteen years ago. There is a widespread feeling that if we can just get enough adults together to make up enough FTE's to survive the baby bust, higher education can revert to its traditional mission of preparing rising generations in two or four years of front-loaded education. Educators closest to the information revolution, however, spend very little time pondering demographic projections. Instead, their time goes to gearing up to meet the increasingly urgent needs of adults for retraining and continuous lifelong education. The department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at M.I.T., for example, on the occasion of their hundredth anniversary, issued a report called Lifelong Cooperative Education (M.I.T., 1982). The title is significant; it suggests that the future of engineering education should be continuous throughout the working life of the engineer and that it will be provided by industry and education working in partnership. The report rejects the notion that a few years of formal education can provide an adequate foundation for half a century of professional work. They note that in engineering it is more than a question of keeping up with new developments. Recent technological developments have not even been based on the same scientific and mathematical knowledge that provided the foundation for earlier

models. Thus engineers who have been out of school for more than a few years face the probability that the very foundations of their knowledge are obsolete. Professor Louis Smullin of M.I.T. was quoted in a recent issue of Time Magazine (October 18, 1982, p. 100) saying that engineers "are washed-up by the time they are thirty-five or forty, and new ones are recruited from the universities." But as the M.I.T. report observes, the demand of the 1980s cannot be met by replacing "obsolescent" engineers with new graduates, even if that were a humanly acceptable plan. Thus they conclude that, "The only apparent alternative is better utilization of the presently available engineering workforce through continuing education at the workplace, with the active encouragement and support of employers" (M.I.T., 1982, p.6). To the Centennial Study Committee, lifelong cooperative education is essential for three reasons:

1. Universities acting alone have neither the human nor the financial resources to carry out a lifelong educational program on the scale required. . . .
2. Engineering faculties cannot by themselves keep up with the knowledge explosion. Close collaboration between engineering faculties and their industrial colleagues is essential if new knowledge is to be distilled from the literature and widely disseminated at the rate at which it is being generated.
3. Engineers in industry and their university colleagues need a supportive environment in which they can teach and learn from one another. A concerted effort will be required to bridge the many gaps -- organizational, social, and temporal -- that now separate 'work' and 'study' (M.I.T., 1982, p. 6-7).

Although these recommendations for radical change in education come from an educationally conservative engineering school, they

are a precursor of things to come across the wide variety of educational institutions. Community colleges, with a tradition of working closely with employers, are at the forefront of the new cooperative efforts between education and industry. In 1981, more than 40 percent of the community colleges in the nation had formal cooperative agreements with employers -- up from 20 percent just five years earlier (Young, 1981). Even more dramatic, perhaps, is the finding that the average community college has nearly 100 specific working arrangements with local organizations, mostly with businesses (Parnell, 1982). Since one of the top priorities of the AACJC, under the presidency of Dale Parnell, is to help increase the productivity of the nation through human resource development, working agreements with industry and the commitment to lifelong education seem a virtual certainty for community colleges in the years ahead.

Lifelong education for jobs is the most visible symptom of social change. But in that change, from full-time education for a few years to part-time education for a lifetime, lie changes for curriculum, instruction, delivery systems, and lifestyles. So far in the history of industrialized nations, there has been a pronounced tendency to increase the separation between education, work, and leisure. The result has been termed the "linear lifeplan" in which education is for the young, work for the middle-aged, and leisure for the elderly. But that lifeplan is changing. A study of the progression and influence of the linear lifeplan in the United States

warns that "There can be little doubt that many of our most serious and persistent social problems stem from the ways in which education, work, and leisure are distributed throughout lifetimes" (Best and Stern, 1976, p. 24). The major social problem is unemployment. Although that problem is especially critical right now, it is not new. For the past fifty years, society has been unable to provide jobs during peacetime for everyone willing and able to work. A blended lifeplan (Cross, 1981) in which education, work, and leisure are concurrent throughout the lifespan can address not only the urgent demands for lifelong education for the workforce, but it can also address personal and societal problems that are arising for youth, the elderly, two-career families, and mid-career executives. There are increasing demands from a variety of people for greater balance in their lives -- more job-sharing, more part-time educational arrangements, more leisure (Cross, 1981).

The blended lifeplan has already had a significant impact on education. Just ten years ago, only about a third of all college students were part-time. Today 42 percent are part-time. Looking only at the patterns of students enrolled in colleges, however, is but a piece of the educational action today. A statewide telephone survey completed last year in California showed that 42 percent of the adult population had participated in at least one course, class, or other organized learning activity in 1981. The largest proportion (27 percent) had taken courses in the community colleges, but higher

education as a whole provided just about half of the education for adults. Other providers, in order of numbers of students served, were specialty schools, employers, associations, community organizations, secondary school districts, and government (Rose and Graesser, 1981, p. 20).

One of the most spectacular changes in the distribution of education throughout the lifespan is seen in the success story of Elderhostel, the network of 634 colleges providing education for elders over 60 years of age. This summer's catalogue lists 1635 weeks of educational programming, and Elderhostel anticipates enrolling 78,000 students -- an increase of 42 percent over last summer (Elderhostel, 1983).

The blended lifeplan is part of the general sociological shift that Alvin Toffler (1982) sees as a trend toward greater diversity and individual choice. The shift is away from the uniformity and mass production that was demanded for the factories of the industrial age, toward the increased variety and personal choice that is possible with the technological revolution. "The direction of change in

family structure, from one type of family to many," says Toffler, "exactly parallels what's happening in the energy system, where we are going from fossil fuel . . . toward a multiplicity of energy forms. It also parallels what's happening in production, where we are going from mass production to customized production; and in communications where we are going from a few central video and publishing networks to cable, cassette, and ad hoc satellite systems" (Toffler, 1981).

The individualization of education via technology is well-illustrated by the approach of Miami-Dade Community College to academic advising. On the face of it, Miami-Dade seems the most unlikely institution in the country to be able to offer individualized academic counseling. Located in one of America's fastest changing cities, Miami-Dade has 45,000 commuting students, a majority of whom are studying part-time. Yet each student registered for credit gets a computerized letter half way into the semester advising on class performance and attendance, suggesting steps that might be taken to avoid problems by semester's end, and advising students who to see and where to find them. That, no doubt, is more personally relevant advising information than students get at institutions one-tenth the size of Miami-Dade.

In another application of computers to academic advising, Miami-Dade makes available computer terminals across their four campuses where students can stop almost any day of the year to

find out exactly what they need to do to meet graduation requirements or requirements for transfer into a variety of majors at any one of a dozen upper-division campuses in the Miami area. One enterprising administrator figured that in order to duplicate the information provided by computers, advisors would have to spend thirty-one working days each semester if they could devote all their working hours to seeing students precisely scheduled at 15-minute intervals (Anandam, 1981). That says nothing about the staff development program that would have to be launched to keep advisors informed of changes in course requirements at upper division universities and their implications for the inevitable changes in student plans.

The diversity and size of education today makes the old models obsolete. They just don't work anymore, and we must find new models to take their place. The reason they don't work, says Toffler (1981) is that schools devised for the factory world emphasized virtues such as obedience, punctuality, and the willingness to do rote work because those were the demands of the Second Wave work force. Schools themselves simulate the standardization of the factory. Everyone arrives for class and departs at a common time; students move on to the next lesson en masse, whether they have learned the material or not, and there is still an emphasis on absorbing information, despite the futility of that mode of education in the era

of the knowledge explosion. Education for the masses can provide for the uniqueness of the individual through custom-designed procedures; mass education is stuck in the standardization of the machine age.

In closing, I'd like to make some summary observations about changing roles for community colleges in the society of the future and to make some suggestions about the implications for leaders.

Observation 1. Knowledge, and therefore education, is more sought after and more important than ever before in history. This is not the time for talking about retrenchment; it is the time for talking up the necessity for a broadly and well-educated citizenry. "Knowledge," says Peter Drucker, "has already become the key to productivity, competitive strength, and economic achievement" (quoted in Naisbitt, 1982, p. 17). We might add that it has also become the key to personal growth and development, to satisfying uses of leisure time, and to the educated citizenry essential to democracy in the Third Wave.

The tide for education is turning. There appears to be growing recognition that education is the foundation for the world in which we live. "In state after state," reported last week's Chronicle for Higher Education (February 23, 1983) "governors are pinning their hopes for economic recovery on the colleges and universities." In the face of increasingly unified calls for human

resource development, educators have to work hard at lifting aside the silver lining of great new opportunities for the knowledge industry to reveal the dark clouds of the demographics of the birth rate.

Observation 2. Education is lifelong. Lifelong learning is not just a catchy slogan for the recruitment of adults to fill the seats left vacant by the baby bust. It is the reality of the Third Wave. That observation has as many implications for teaching 18-24 year old undergraduates as for reaching middle-aged executives with a need for renewal and blue- and pink-collar workers whose skills have been made obsolete by the introduction of office electronics and robotics. The knowledge explosion is just that. There is no way to keep up with the explosion of new knowledge. It is created faster than it can be learned or taught. Between 6,000 and 7,000 scientific articles are written each day, and information doubles every 5.5 years. The problem for the future is not the supply of information, but the selection. People need to know how to select the appropriate information from an overwhelming array available, and they need to know how to use it in conceptual thinking. We're talking about something far more basic to education than technical and scientific training. We're talking about the need for broadly educated people with the skills that will serve as the foundation for a lifetime of learning. That calls for fewer information-laden lectures and more active analysis, synthesis,

and application of knowledge on the part of students. Teachers who see their role as providers of information can and will be replaced by machines. Teachers who nurture, inspire, and assist in cognitive growth and intellectual development cannot be replaced by machines. They are our greatest resource in the development of human capital.

Observation 3. Education will pervade all of the organizations of society, and lifelong learners will have an unprecedented choice in what, where, when, and how they learn. The notion of College A competing with College B for students will become quaint in the face of new competition from employers, community agencies, and the new technologies. Industry today can do almost anything colleges can do and more. They can and do offer degrees and courses for credit.

They can recognize whatever credentials or competencies they choose with the most tangible rewards of all -- promotion and salary increases. There is, however, no evidence that employers wish to build expensive educational facilities and hire professional staff if they can get such services at someone else's expense. But make no mistake, industry is dependent on human capital. If they cannot get it from schools and colleges, they will have to develop it themselves. Cooperative programs, with providers in the Learning Society seeking to find their own niches, will be far more beneficial to providers, students, and society in general than destructive

competition. Community colleges, in particular, have established a reputation for flexibility and cooperation. The OTA Report (1982, p. 83) observes, "More than any other educational institution, the American community college has exhibited an ability and willingness to adapt rapidly to changing societal needs and circumstances."

I contend that the changing circumstances to which educational leaders should be attending are those concerned with the changing role of education in society. Leaders of higher education might better spend more time at workshops designed to help educators educate and inspire the public to the coming changes in society and somewhat less time at workshops focusing on the skills and techniques of managing decline. By this, I do not mean to discourage the real managers of education, i.e., those in business offices and middle-level management positions, from improving their management skills. My point is that the proper role for presidents and deans is to exercise leadership and supervise management. There has never been a greater need for leaders to prepare us for a society in which education is the key to personal and societal growth and development.

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