

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE LEARNING SOCIETY

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Because the theme of your conference addresses the expanding role of part-time faculty in higher education, I thought it might be appropriate to look at education all along that new front of where education meets society. The growing numbers of part-time faculty and part-time students are symbols of the merger of higher education and the Learning Society.

There was a time when higher education gloried in its isolation. Campuses were deliberately established in small towns such as Ann Arbor, Palo Alto, and Urbana, away from the hustle and bustle of the growing centers of population. Students came to the campus to spend four years in artificial worlds consisting of other young people as much like themselves as possible. Professors lived on or near the campus and, without the distractions of corporate board meetings and jet air travel to distant countries, devoted themselves largely to teaching and the pure world of ideas. There are some who would like to return to those days that probably look more peaceful in retrospect than they were in fact, but that is not where education is

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these days. Forty percent of this fall's entering college students are part-time students, and a third are twenty-five or older. If the predictions of the National Center for Education Statistics hold true, part-time students will predominate by 1985. Part-time faculty are also a growing phenomenon in higher education. In colleges across the nation, one third of the faculty are part-time, and in community colleges, part-time faculty are the new majority, making up 57 percent of the teaching force. You, like so many of your students, come to your classes on or off the campus from jobs and lives that are immersed in the realities of business, professional practice, homes and families.

Nationally, higher education has changed dramatically over the past ten years, from a generally full-time commitment to learning for a few years of the student's life to a part-time involvement in a lifetime of learning. Thus for the first time in our professional experience, American higher education is genuinely faced with the possibility of new forms of education that are not simple extensions of the past. For most of the years of its development, higher education has been expanding--taking in more students, building more campuses, hiring more faculty, teaching more subjects, spending more money. Clearly, that era has ended. For those who equate campus growth with health, a gloomy pessimism about the future of education prevails. Although the coming decade of adjustment to a leaner diet will be difficult for many colleges, it is campuses, not education, that have stopped growing.

Almost certainly, knowledge is power on the new frontier--for individuals, organizations, and society as a whole. It is inconceivable that education will be less important tomorrow than it is today. From the ancient occupations of agriculture and fishing to the futuristic "high tech" occupations, workers will need to be better educated than ever before. Moreover, the continued expansion of education to previously unserved segments of the population is inevitable. Everyone is going to need more education--women as well as men, minorities as well as majorities, old as well as young, poor as well as rich, handicapped as well as able-bodied, hard-to-teach as well as easy-to-teach. Finally, education is increasingly important because there are simply more things to learn--appreciations to enrich life, knowledge to enhance personal growth, skills to improve performance.

More education for more people for more years of their lives would seem to make education a growth industry. The literature and gloomy prognostications of higher education notwithstanding, education in the broad meaning of that term is of growing importance in the society. We have all heard it said that the railroads failed, not because there was no longer a need for their services--indeed, the need for transportation was growing--but because the tunnel vision of the railroad operators concentrated on running the railroads instead of exploring the new frontier of the transportation industry. It is

sobering to observe that the running of colleges and universities is the Number One concern of higher education today. Such narrow vision could be just as fatal to colleges and universities as the preoccupation with management was to the railroads in an earlier era.

If we looked to the broad future of education in the society rather than to the narrow future of colleges and universities, what would we see?

First, we would see a greatly increased need for learning, for more people and for more years of their lives. Second, we would see a wider range of offerings and an explosive increase in the number of organizations providing educational services. Third, we would see some new arrangements among providers and new ways of delivering educational services. All of these steps into the Learning Society are in progress now, and since they are changing the role of colleges and universities in society, let us look at them more closely.

The need for education on the part of both individuals and society is escalating as fast as the world changes--and that is at a heady pace these days. Margaret Mead once remarked that the world in which we were born is not the world in which we live nor is that the world in which we will die. I was born into a world without television, mass air travel, credit cards, frozen foods, or computers. My parents were born into a world without automobiles, radios, or refrigerators. That is a lot

of change in a short span of time, but change has a way of escalating so that each new generation is coping with a faster rate of change than the preceeding generation. The transportation industry serves as a good example. For thousands of years, people transported themselves and their worldly goods by walking from place to place. With the taming of the horse, the distance travelled and the loads transported became a different order of magnitude. With the invention of trains and cars, another quantum leap occurred. Then airplanes increased the speed of travel, not just from 20 to 80 miles per hour as improvements in the car had done, but from 80 to 800 miles per hour. Now Voyager II is moving through space not just ten times faster than airplanes, but at the rate of 54 thousand miles per hour--20 times faster than a speeding bullet! Once the quantum leap occurs, the old transportation method may still exist, but trying to improve it to compete with the new proves frustrating and futile. No amount of careful breeding, attention to diet, or training can make the greatest horse even approach in efficiency the "transportation work" done by the most mediocre car.

Technological advance in the transportation industry has resulted not just in greater speed, but in a fundamentally different mode of transportation. Moreover, the time elapsing between inventions has grown shorter and shorter. Walking, as a means of transportation, served generation after generation; jet airplanes and space travel occurred within the time-span of a single generation.

The speed of change not only affects the lives of individuals, it changes the way society handles education. Instead of parents passing on what they have learned to their children, children today must learn lessons never known by their parents. It is the rare child who learns the skills for his or her livelihood from parents. There is, for example, nothing that the horse breeder, as transportation magnate of his generation, can teach his son about horses that is at all relevant to the transportation industry once the quantum leap of the invention of the internal combustion engine has been made.

Quantum leaps in knowledge are still occurring with considerable regularity. The half-life of knowledge in medicine is now about five years, meaning that within five years of receiving the M.D., half of all a doctor's information and training is obsolete. Changes in knowledge in science and technology tend to be spectacular, but social change too occurs with great regularity and demands rapid adaptation. I don't know what the half-life of knowledge in accounting is these days, but I wouldn't want a tax accountant who was not spending substantial chunks of time in rather formal learning related to changes in the tax laws.

The women's movement represents a different kind of social change, but it has sent millions of women back to school to obtain the college degree and professional education that will permit them to compete for the new options that have become

available. Many of them are in your classes this fall. In short, we have become a nation of lifelong learners, and the route to virtually all upward mobility is through education.

In that statement, "the route to virtually all upward mobility is through education," lies one of our greatest concerns about the potential vitality of the Learning Society. Not everyone is a participant. For those who are not, the future holds little promise, not even the faintly reassuring thought that they can retain their present position while the world changes about them. For what the world seems to be doing is leaving the poorly educated sidelined while the already well-educated are taking the fast track to ever more education. One of the most consistent findings of all of the research in adult learning is that education is addictive. The more people have, the more they want, the more they participate, and of course, the better their position politically and economically to get what they want. A college graduate is seven times as likely to be participating in some form of organized learning as a high school drop-out, and the gap between the well-educated and the poorly educated is widening rather than narrowing as the Learning Society picks up speed. The almost certain result is that as opportunities for education grow, so will the gap between the educational "haves" and "have-nots."

The situation is far easier to understand than to remedy. Everything the college graduate does adds to the prob-

ability of further education, while everything the high school dropout does militates against further education. The college graduate frequently enters an employee training program, works for a company or in an occupation that is likely not only to support but to require further education. College graduates typically belong to social and professional groups that discuss educational opportunities; spouses and friends are supportive and admiring of educational accomplishment. And finally, those who continued in school long enough to graduate from college were usually happy and successful in school and are familiar with the procedures and people that inhabit educational institutions.

The situation is exactly the reverse for the poorly educated. They enter low-paying jobs with few educational requirements and no educational benefits. They consort with friends and family who know little about education and may even be hostile to it; they lack the information networks to know about opportunities and the skills to take advantage of them. They are on the downward spiral with respect to education, and they become the hard core undereducated, taking up lifestyles and values that spawn new generations of undereducated.

The serious problem facing us now is that the federal government and some states are advocating policies that leave adult education to free-market competition. Such a policy encourages education providers to pitch their services to the most promising and lucrative markets, leaving non-participants

on the fringes of inadequacy.

What is needed, I suggest, is a far wider and more varied system of entrances into the Learning Society. Many colleges have devised special programs such as those for "re-entry" women that give adults who have been out of school for some years the support, self-confidence, and skills that they need to participate fully in college classes. Equally important, however, is the encouragement of what I call low threat learning opportunities that may be offered by other educational providers, such as community agencies, television, and employers. In these times when most colleges are beating the bushes for more students, there is a tendency to feel that other providers of educational services are in competition with colleges. There is good reason to think, however, that there is a hierarchy of threat in educational opportunities and that adults will enter the Learning Society at the threat level that is tolerable for them. (See Cross, 1981, Chapter 6). We know, for example, that adults who build self-confidence as learners by taking a televised course at home may soon venture onto the campus to try the on-campus competition. Similarly many employees, introduced to classes on the familiar turf of the workplace, may build enough confidence and interest to venture out on their own to off-campus centers and then to classes on campus.

Higher education, if we are smart, will encourage and help build a wide variety of low-threat entry level opportunities

in the Learning Society. The so-called non-traditional forms of education, far from competing with traditional education, are engaged in the critically important business of making education convenient and attractive, and in some cases, just downright possible, for many adults who are potential college students. Whether the new entry-level opportunities are offered by your own college departments, such as extension or community education, or by other providers such as television or employers, there is every reason for higher education to take the broad view in developing the Learning Society. Getting more adults introduced to the satisfactions of lifelong learning is of benefit to the adults concerned because it is the essential route to upward mobility and necessary even to keeping abreast of the fast pace of change. It is advantageous to society because the wheels of change and progress are fueled largely by adults learning new ways to accomplish society's work. Finally, higher education itself stands to gain from the fullest possible blooming of the Learning Society because once people have been introduced to the satisfactions of adult learning, they are quite likely to seek new opportunities and to move to ever more advanced and sophisticated levels of learning.

This analysis, plus the past experience of the decline of the railroads because they saw themselves as railroads and not as part of the larger transportation industry, should suggest to higher education that the development of the Learning Society is a long-term investment that is every bit as impor-

tant as the short-term concerns about running the college.

The second characteristic of the future that I predicted in my introductory remarks is the proliferation of educational providers in the Learning Society. Institutions of higher education are not alone on the educational frontier of the Twenty-first Century. Industry spends not mere millions but billions of dollars annually on the education and training of employees. Last year, AT&T spent $4\frac{1}{2}$ times as much on the education of its employees as MIT spent on the education of its students (Luxenberg, 1978-79). The modern IBM campus north of New York City has classrooms and residence halls that surpass anything offered in our most exclusive and expensive colleges. Professional associations too are becoming the builders of vast educational networks. The American Management Association, with an annual education budget of 50 million dollars uses 7,500 lecturers and discussion leaders to conduct 2,000 formal education programs each year. The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants offers extensive professional education programs, consisting of individual study and regional workshops that rival the degree-granting monopoly of higher education because licensing boards that determine who is licensed to practice accounting recognize AICPA education as appropriate to professional practice.

Educational purists like to make a distinction between the education offered by colleges and the training offered by industry, but such distinctions are difficult to maintain. Non-collegiate organizations have moved into education almost

as fast as colleges, especially community colleges, have moved into training, and the distinction is now blurred beyond usefulness--at least when applied to providers. Colleges are heavily involved in training as well as in education; and the programs of many corporations contain as much emphasis on theory, research, and personal development as those of any business school.

A related blurring of educational functions occurs in the distinction between credit and non-credit learning. Within commuting distance of my home near Boston are four new degree-granting programs founded by corporations--a hospital, a bank, a consulting firm, and a computer manufacturer. While the image of Bachelor's and Master's degrees offered by non-colleges is still mildly sensational, the movement of collegiate institutions into the realm of non-credit instruction is now commonplace. Between 1968 and 1978, the number of colleges offering non-credit instruction more than doubled, until today it is the norm rather than the exception for degree-granting institutions to be involved in non-degree instruction. But whether a course was originally taken for credit is not especially important today. It is increasingly easy to convert non-credit learning into college degrees. Just a decade ago, only about a third of American colleges granted credit if students could demonstrate on standardized examinations that they knew the material; today 84 percent of all colleges grant credit for CLEP examinations. Ten years ago, only 14 percent of the colleges would consider granting credit for experiential learning; today

41 percent do (Stadtman, 1980).

Historically, colleges have been reasonably generous in accepting credit from other colleges; today they are increasingly likely to endorse learning regardless of its source. The American Council on Education's Office of Education Credit lists over a thousand courses offered by more than a hundred corporations that appear worthy of college credit.

Illustrations of the blurring of once-distinctive functions for higher education could be extended, but my point is that the education frontier is very large, and higher education is not alone out there. There are potential partners, competitors and parallel operators. How we deal with this new phenomenon may determine the future of higher education, as well as have profound implications for the broader Learning Society.

There are three basic ways to work with others on the new frontiers of education. We can compete, cooperate, or run parallel operations. In the beginning, the relationship between collegiate institutions and other providers of education was essentially parallel. Colleges taught the classics, textile mills taught weaving, and butcher shops taught butchering. Each went its own way along well-defined paths. Many educators act as though parallelism still predominates. Plodding along their own path, they keep pretty much to themselves, quite unaware of travelers on other pathways. Occasionally, they are startled to see others on what they thought was their pathway, and the question arises as to whether they should continue on as

though nothing had happened, try to push the others off the path, or stop and have a conversation about where they are going and how best to get there.

It will be increasingly difficult to remain unaware of the traffic on the new frontier for two reasons. The first is that the most promising new market for educational services from now until the end of the century will be adult learners who are thrown constantly into contact with many education providers, among them employers, professional associations, unions, and community groups. Because these providers are serving roughly the same market, it is going to be almost impossible to remain as unaware as in the past of one another's services.

The second reason for the gradual disappearance of a blissful ignorance of other education providers is the recent emphasis on informing consumers about their options. The federal government contributes to education information activities in each state; brokerage and advising services for adult learners are springing up everywhere; computers are crammed full of a wide variety of education options; and finally, educators themselves are mailing brochures and advertising in newspapers and on radio and television. And so, the mode of unaware parallelism as an approach to getting along with others on the new frontier is rapidly disappearing as an option.

There is another kind of parallelism, however, that will probably increase in the years ahead. It is the model in which each provider performs a unique function within well-defined

boundaries. Entrepreneurs from education, business, and government interested in launching education programs are beginning to look for the unique service that is not being performed by anyone else. In the jargon of the trade, this is known as seeking the "market niche" which simply means that providers who are potentially competitive will seek the unique service where competition is weak or nonexistent.

Parallelism can be maintained only through conscious and sustained effort and by careful definition of non-overlapping functions. While parallelism is still possible on the new frontier, it calls for a narrowing of function and a steadfast refusal to be seduced by attractive opportunities. Colleges could, for example, reduce overlap with two large competitors, professional associations and industry, by returning to the liberal arts tradition. To do so, however, involves risks that few colleges are willing to take. The new adult clientele, it turns out, are just as career minded as younger students, and despite recent collegiate attention to general education, students are placing more emphasis, not less, on vocational goals. Many formerly "pure" liberal arts colleges are instituting programs in business administration and allied health services as fast as conditions permit. I see few signs that colleges have any intention of reducing potential overlap through narrowing the scope of their functions.

So let us turn now to the third characteristic of the

Learning Society and explore the potential for competition and/or cooperation on the new frontier. I referred earlier to the rapid rise of corporate education which has been called the "shadow" educational system. The question now is whether we should cooperate or compete with our shadow , since it seems unlikely that we can escape it.

A giant among corporate educators is AT&T with over a million employees, a fast-changing technology, and an education budget growing at the rate of 35 percent per year. On any given work day, AT&T has 30,000 employees engaged in a half-day or more of instruction at a total cost, including employee salaries, of 6.8 million dollars per day. That's more than the annual budget of many colleges. Understandably, AT&T management is looking for ways to cut those costs. One way to do that is to try to shift some of the educational burden back to colleges. It is far cheaper to contract with organizations that specialize in education than it is to train teachers, build facilities, operate classrooms, and administer programs with industry's own funds. Fortunately, industry's need for help with adult training and higher education's need for students coincide for perhaps the first time in history, so let us look at the situation more carefully.

One of the simplest ways to shift responsibilities to colleges is to provide tuition reimbursement. It is simple because it permits maximum freedom for all parties and requires almost

no coordination or discussion. And that may be the reason for its extremely low rate of utilization, which is variously estimated at between 5 and 10 percent of the eligible employees. When more than 90 percent of the United Auto Workers ignore \$900 per year in tuition benefits, it is reasonable to conclude that for some not-very-well-studied reasons, the tuition reimbursement plan fails to connect the needs of industry, workers, and colleges. What is needed are some stronger connecting links, and that probably means more conversations, more coordination, and more cooperation between education and industry.

Most colleges still think of individual students as their market--in part, at least because federal policy has put the money in the hands of students--but industry may be the new rich uncle. There is considerable talk these days, even within business, about the obligation and self-interest of business in supporting a stronger educational system. To many college presidents, that suggests a memo to the development office urging a new pitch for gifts and endowments. But for colleges with a mission that includes helping workers and professionals keep abreast of changing demands, the memo might better go to the Business, English, and Math departments. Community colleges have been quick to capitalize on new partnerships with industry. A recent survey found that over 40 percent of the community colleges now report formal agreements with industry, a percentage that has doubled in just five years (Young, 1981).

Such close cooperation seems to be working, largely, I suspect because it, unlike the tuition reimbursement plan, is specifically designed to address the needs of all parties. Employers stand to benefit from an appropriately trained workforce; employees become eligible for better jobs and promotions because they have skills considered relevant by employers. Whether the arrangement meets the needs of colleges is a question best determined by the mission of the college. Clearly, the needs of a comprehensive community college with a mission to serve the community are being met through the close cooperation with local employers. Similarly a graduate School of Business training corporate executives is fulfilling its mission.

Whether a college dedicated to liberal education should use contracts with industry to preserve its campus and faculty without preserving its function is a question best answered by the college. It seems quite obvious that no one wants higher education to become the servant of industry. But it seems equally obvious that education has always served as the major route to the social and scientific progress that are reflected in the work lives of adults.

Without question, the emergence of the Learning Society places higher education in a new role. I believe that role calls for leadership of the highest order. Now is not the time for narrow perspectives of self-interest and competition. Rather, it is the time for maximum cooperation in the design of new patterns of education that can serve a world that has become dependent on lifelong education.

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