

Views From The Outside

K. Patricia Cross

I have labeled the remarks I am about to make "Views From The Outside" for I am not one of you. While I am not in the least modest about my knowledge of the educational philosophy and research of cooperative education, I have much to be modest about in my knowledge of the day to day realities of running a cooperative program. But my interest in cooperative education is almost lifelong. As a graduate of an Illinois high school in the 1940's I wanted more than anything in the world to go to Antioch to participate in their cooperative program. I didn't know anyone who had ever attended Antioch nor did Antioch have any reputation, good or bad, in my little town. But I spent many an hour drooling over the catalogue that made more educational sense to me than anything I read elsewhere. My cooperative education was not to be, however. After a careful cost analysis, it turned out to be far less expensive for me to accept a scholarship, work summers in the drugstore, and attend the local teacher's college. Since unfulfilled aspirations die slowly, it is not surprising, I guess, that I retain my interest in cooperative education now that I am professionally concerned with research and analysis in higher education. Happily, my intuitive faith in cooperative education as a 17 year-old has been validated by my professional study in recent

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years. Indeed, cooperative education is much more important today than it was when I was so enthralled in the 1940's.

One of the things I can contribute to this conference as an outsider is some perspective about where you fit in the broader scheme of things in higher education. I can look better to your past and your future than to your present--an area in which I bow to your reality orientation.

Cooperative education has been a long time coming into its own. The concept was introduced to American education 70 years ago, but it did not really catch on with educators or with the American public until quite recently. Not until the 1960's did cooperative education come into prominence. Why did such a seemingly sound idea sit around so long before it was accepted? And why is it so suddenly popular now? Have people finally discovered the validity of the educational concept or is it just one of those things that is swept along on a rising tide of external forces over which we have no control? I'd like to devote the first portion of my remarks this morning to an analysis of why cooperative education is a movement that seems intimately in touch with our times. To do that I want to look at cooperative education in the context of the broader social and educational forces that move and change people and organizations. Then, since I am by nature suspicious of sudden prominence and rapid success, I would like to devote the remainder of the period to a worrywart's search for some neglected areas that may lie as hidden deterrents to the continued growth and development of cooperative education.

Admittedly, almost anything can happen to the cooperative movement in these days of tightening job markets and steady-state education. But viewed from the longer perspective of the last decade, there can be no argument with the observation that cooperative education has

been riding on the very crest of educational success. Whether co-op's success is measured by growth statistics or by the progressive position of its educational philosophy, it is fair to say that it has outdistanced most forms of higher education by a considerable margin.

In 1960, there were only 35 co-op programs in this country. Today there are more than 800, and I understand that there are some 400 additional requests in to the Office of Education for funding next year. Growth measured in quantitative terms, however, is not as important to educational progress as growth measured in qualitative terms. And the educational philosophy of cooperative education has been progressively ahead of the times. In 1960, no one was talking about "experiential education." Now the notion that valid creditable learning can take place out of the classroom and off of the campus is all the rage in higher education.

So why all the excitement about something that cooperative educators have known about for years? Let me talk first about the external forces in education and in the broader society that seem to push cooperative education into prominence now.

First and foremost is the egalitarian thrust that has been present in this country ever since its founding. The pressures to provide for the social and economic needs of the "common man," have been unceasing and have been largely implemented through the educational system. We sometimes regard "equality of opportunity" as a modern phrase, but the idea has been the major force for change throughout the history of higher education. Colleges started in this country as elitist institutions, serving only a small portion of the population. Despite such elitism, higher education has been endorsed and supported by the common people,

always in the hope that their children would be included in the next wave of college students. This has resulted in constant pressure for the expansion of colleges to include an ever widening pool of aspirants.

The curriculum of the earliest colleges consisted largely of classical subjects such as Latin and Greek, hardly a useful curriculum for the working people. Over the years, the curriculum and constituency of Harvard and similar colleges kept expanding until they reached the point where they were unwilling or unable to admit students whom they felt would not meet their standards or to introduce the "practical subjects" demanded by the new aspirants. At that point, the rising aspirations of the people encouraged the development of totally new institutions--the land-grant universities with a mission to teach more practical subjects to the children of the working classes, i.e., to offer equal opportunity. History then repeated itself in the first half of this century as the land-grant universities expanded their subject matter and their admissions standards as far as they were willing or able to go. Then the next wave of the working classes demanded the establishment of the community colleges with a curriculum that seems to know no bounds as far as comprehensiveness is concerned and with an open door policy that promises to exclude no one. Although it seems that a curriculum that includes beauty operators and funeral directors and a door that is open to all leaves no room for expansion, the community colleges are already being challenged for not responding to the needs of people for off-campus education. And history repeats itself by establishing a new type of educational institution that offers an external degree in the interests of equal opportunity for all of the people.

The history of higher education can be written in terms of

expanding circles as larger proportions of the population are served with an ever expanding curriculum. Steadily the curriculum has become more practical and relevant to the lives of the people. It is not surprising in view of our history that the next step after the comprehensive curriculum of the community colleges should be experiential learning.

Cooperative education has been fundamentally egalitarian from the beginning--not in its admissions practices, but in its educational philosophy. It reached out years ago to include the community and their interests in the education of youth.

The fundamental idea behind cooperative education was to integrate education into the lives of people. Whereas early ^{elitist} colleges were established on isolated campuses away from the pressing realities of everyday living, cooperative education asked its students to live and work and learn among the people. Whereas early colleges sought isolated scholars for the faculty, cooperative education insisted that practical working men also had lessons to teach. Cooperative education is rooted in egalitarianism because it has avoided hierarchies that extol the superiority of one brand of education over another. Over the years, you have remained remarkably free of the rigidity of either/or positions. Cooperative education maintains that we need to expose our youth to erudite scholars and practical businessmen; students need abstract classroom discussions and on-the-job experience; time should be provided for library contemplation and for practical problem solving.

Cooperative education grew slowly in the beginning--at the rate of less than one program per year in the first 35 years of its existence ~~I think that this was~~ because the country was not ready for co-op in the first half of this century. It was not until egalitarianism was legiti-

mized in higher education through historical evolution that co-op could come into its own. There are, then, some social trends that are responsible in part for the ready acceptance of co-op today. Cooperative education does what people think education should do in egalitarian eras. It provides the kind of education that is useful and practical for people from all walks of life. It offers, in a very direct way, the opportunity for social and economic equality.

But there are also some educational trends that have pushed the cooperative idea along. If I were to pick the single factor that has had, and will continue to have the most influence on our perception of educational goals and purposes, I believe that I would have to give first place to the information explosion. Every forty minutes, there is enough new information added to the world's libraries to fill a 24 volume set of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Even the scholar can keep up with only a limited amount of knowledge in his or her academic discipline. It is far easier today to retrieve information when it is needed than to store it in the human mind--which, it turns out, is a very inefficient storage tank. Most of the factual information that we learn is forgotten within a very short span of time. To continue to emphasize the accumulation of knowledge is inefficient in view of what we know about human forgetting, and it is futile in terms of what we know about the continuous explosion of information.

Unfortunately, students seem quicker to recognize the folly of a content-heavy curriculum than faculty. In a recent ETS research study of the goals of the University of California, students were much more dissatisfied with the emphasis on the accumulation of knowledge in the academic disciplines than faculty were (Peterson, 1973)*. Students felt that the University presently gives

*Peterson, R. E. Goals for California higher education: A survey of 116 academic communities. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1973.

to the teaching of content
3rd priority, whereas it would be desirable to demote it to 14th priority in the list of 20 goals. We in higher education teach content and we measure content, not because we equate the educated person with a walking encyclopedia, but because we don't know how to teach the appreciations of learning and the intellectual skills of problem-solving. I am not suggesting that students can learn to think in the absence of content to think about. But neither can they learn to think when the goal of education becomes the mere accumulation of information.

Cooperative education is ahead of its times in its educational philosophy. Once again cooperative education has avoided taking a strong either/or position. It is not a question of whether academic content is more respectable or more important than applied learning. Rather, the well-educated individual needs both, and cooperative education has the mechanism to provide this balance.

We are still riding the rising tide on expanding our concept of school learning to include the application of knowledge. But massive strides are being made in this realm. Competency-based education is one of the most frequently discussed innovations in education today, and like experiential education, one can hardly attend a professional conference or pick up a journal without seeing some reference to competency as an educational goal.

Although on-the-job performance was not called competency-based evaluation 70 years ago, cooperative education has been explicitly concerned about the development of competencies as well as knowledge. With the national push toward educational competency, you as cooperative educators will find yourselves both helped and threatened by the entrance of everyone else into the act.

Arising out of big research projects such as ETS's consortium of colleges working on the measurement of experiential learning will come new and more sophisticated measures of the learning component of on-the-job experience. The old techniques will no longer be adequate and you will have to teach yourselves some new tricks. You are going to have to grow in sophistication and quality if you hope to retain your position as educational visionaries. It is not apparent to me, for example, that the education offered by cooperative programs is much different today from what it was 50 years ago. True, new calendars have been introduced and there exists an infinite variety of options and flexibilities that were not present even 10 years ago. But those are structural and procedural changes. They are important, but they are surface rather than fundamental educational innovations.

What are you doing, for example, as on-campus or off-campus educators, to enrich the learning experience of the work component of cooperative education? Is there anything in that experience that is really educationally different from that gained by any young person setting out on a first job? Programs differ, of course, but I suspect that the majority of cooperative coordinators are so pleased to find a job slot that seems reasonably related to college study that they don't want to press their good fortune by working constantly with the employer to improve the educational experience. Likewise, I suspect that the majority of employers feel that their job will give the student some kind of reality orientation to the world of work, and they don't want to rock the boat by pressing

supervisors to examine and improve the experience so that it truly becomes educationally significant. As a matter of fact, with the new emphasis on lifelong education, enlightened employers will be looking for ways to help all of their employees continue to learn and develop on the job. We may find that the new co-op student is a worker who wants to add education to his experience rather than a student adding work to his education.

Now is not the time to rest on your laurels while the rest of the educational community catches up. You have some things in place that are of great interest to educators newly concerned with the application of knowledge. By the same token, they have some things going in their specifications and measurements that will strengthen your programs.

Let me give one specific example. Cooperative educators have generally found it much easier to design and carry out programs in fields which are obviously career-related than in the liberal arts. The job component for liberal arts, like the classroom component, has rather murky goals, and almost any job that calls for some cognitive effort can be considered an adequate experience that will somehow add to the student's liberal education. I happen to think that our blind faith in work as education is probably justified, but until I know in what way the experience helps the student, I am powerless to improve it and must simply hope for the best. We were doing that 50 years ago.

Let me take a few minutes to describe what could be done by using a competency-based model such as that proposed by Alverno College. Alverno College is a small Catholic women's college located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Within the last few years, it has been transformed, by the dynamic leadership of Sister Josel Reed, into one of the most progressively experimental colleges in the country. Alverno has developed a competency-based liberal arts program. Their goal is to define their degree in terms of competencies rather than credits. Students must

demonstrate eight competencies before graduation. Very briefly those competencies are:

1. Development of effective communications skills.
2. Sharpening of analytical abilities.
3. Development of workable problem-solving skills.
4. Development of facility in making independent value judgments and independent decisions.
5. Development of the facility for social interaction.
6. Achievement of an understanding of the relationship of the individual and the environment.
7. Development of an awareness and understanding of the world in which the individual lives.
8. Development of knowledge, understanding, and responsiveness to the arts and humanities.

These competencies are not terribly different from those described in many liberal arts college catalogues. The thing that is dramatically different is that Alverno intends to evaluate students on the attainment of these competencies.

They describe in considerable detail exactly how they are going to measure each of these competencies at various levels of attainment. It occurs to me that some of these competencies are best developed and evaluated in the job component experience of cooperative education. For example, Alverno's competency measures for problem-solving ability calls for the application of formally-learned problem-solving skills to a real problem.

We assume in cooperative education that working on a job requires a series of solutions to problems, but we know that the typical student either blindly imitates the employee who "shows him how" or else he stumbles upon a solution through trial and error that is not much more sophisticated than that shown by the monkeys in the psychology laboratory. Why shouldn't liberal arts students be required to demonstrate that they have learned something about the process of solving problems in the

classroom and that they can apply this knowledge to real-life problems? Jobs could be much more valuable learning experiences than what we presently offer through random opportunism.

Take another example. Alverno's Competence 5--developing the facility for social interaction--is reputed to be an important advantage of cooperative education. Some rather sweeping assertions have been made regarding the personal growth in social relationships that occur on the job. There is no good research to document or refute this claim. The point is that we neither set the job up to encourage growth in interpersonal relations nor do we develop any good measures of what has occurred. We just hope something good happens through the random experiences of working on a task with different kinds of people. This is not really education; it is just experience. Alverno's competency-based goals call for the student's conscious attention to improving relationships with others and to evaluating progress.

I cite Alverno's plan in some detail because it illustrates the great compatibility between competency-based and cooperative education programs. Cooperative educators can both learn from and contribute to the growing interest in emphasizing competence over credentials as the significant reward of a college education.

There is another movement taking place in higher education that cooperative educators can learn from and contribute to. And that is the stress on the improvement of undergraduate teaching. How committed are you to the "cooperative" in cooperative education? The philosophy of cooperative education requires that classroom faculty and on-the-job supervisors share the responsibility for the education of students.

On-the-job supervisors should offer something more than experience and a certain amount of patience with beginners. They, like on-campus faculty, should be concerned about what they can do to enrich the educational component of the job experience. Teaching is a skill, and teaching the application of knowledge calls for as much skill as teaching the content of knowledge. Most colleges are aware of the need for on-campus staff development to cope with the changing student scene. Cooperative education, it seems to me, has an equal responsibility for off-campus staff development.

Let me not convey the impression that I think working together in cooperative education is a one-way street with on-campus educators communicating their expertise to off-campus educators. I suspect that there is no cooperative program in this country that has fully utilized the potential of the off-campus educators. Their insights can add a dimension of strength to cooperative education that we as college faculty may not see.

Time permits only a light skipping across the surface of the complex educational ideas existing in the cooperative plan. I can raise only a few questions that occur to one outsider. I hope that the responders and the audience will raise other issues and continue to pursue them throughout the conference.

If I could leave but one idea with you, it would be a plea to give more attention to the implementation of the educational philosophy behind cooperative education. Educators in general give more attention to running their institutions than they do to serving their customers. But the heavy administrative burden of cooperative education makes you more susceptible than most to think that if the program runs smoothly admini-

stratively, it is successful. The urgent always seems to have a way of crowding out the important. I hope that cooperative educators on and off the campus will continue to produce educational visionaries, concerned about the improvement of education.

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