

## TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE 1980s

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I have been asked to address myself this evening to the general topic of current trends in higher education. Given the rapid pace of change in higher education, it would probably be the better part of wisdom to define "current" trends as those occurring within the decade of the 1970s. But I would like to spill over this decade to look at educational trends from the perspective of the recent past and the near future.

The educational establishment has frequently been accused of resisting change, but there has been enormous change in higher education just within the professional lifetimes of those of us in this room. I would be the first to admit, however, that so far most of the dramatic change that has affected higher education has not been initiated by educators, but rather has been forced upon us by the rapidly changing needs of society. It is fair to say, I think, that while higher education's mission in society has changed a great deal, educational practices and procedures have changed very little--especially those related to classroom instruction. As Clark Kerr has quite rightly observed "You could go back to the University of Bologna in the Twelfth Century and feel more or less at home."

Change in the mission of higher education has been especially rapid over the last 30 years. Indeed we seem to have entered each new decade with a new theme for higher education. In the 1950s, the theme was academic excellence; in the 1960s it was equal opportunity; and in the 1970s the emphasis has turned to concern about the quality of education. Let me describe briefly the three distinct periods of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

Many of you will remember the crush of college students in the years immediately following World War II. The number of people wanting to go to college far exceeded the number of places available. Decisions had to be made about which students could go to college, and the nation put the emphasis on selection based on academic merit. The assumption was that those who had done well in school in the past would do well in college and would go on to become the leaders of society. Academic excellence was the slogan, but in the 1950s version the academic reputation of a college depended more on the ability of the admissions office to select an outstanding class than on the ability of the teaching faculty to create one.

It is no wonder that the Carnegie Commission (1973) refers to the post World War II years as the Golden Age of higher education. Surely the work of higher education will never be as easy again. In those growth years money was no big problem, job offers for faculty were plentiful, and teaching selected and relatively homogeneous student bodies posed only minor pedagogical problems. Anyway the atmosphere of the times was such that problems with

student learning were felt to be more the problem of the student or the problem of the admissions office than the problem of the faculty.

② Emerging in the latter half of the 1950s, but making itself felt in the 1960s, was the dramatic shift in social priorities that was to affect higher education so profoundly. Equal opportunity became the national priority. There was a ~~none-too-subtle~~ shift in the assignment for postsecondary education. The task nationally was no longer to <sup>select the brightest y.p. & nation and</sup> educate an elite few for positions of leadership, but rather to educate the masses. Supply began to catch up with demand as <sup>new colleges were established 1960-1970.</sup> ~~open-door colleges~~ mushroomed throughout the nation; financial aid based on need rather than talent became a federal priority; open admissions challenged selective admissions; and the rate of college attendance for high school graduates reached a peak by the end of the decade.

③ Underlying the euphoria brought about by expansion and growth, however, was a crisis in purpose for higher education. For the <sup>spectacular</sup> growth of the 1960s <sup>however</sup> meant not merely more students, but different kinds of students. The purpose of the <sup>selective</sup> meritocratic education of the postwar years was to provide advanced education for a select group of those <sup>thought to be the future leaders or of</sup> "meriting" it, but the purpose of <sup>O-A</sup> egalitarian education was to provide education for everyone-- regardless of past merit or future promise. In <sup>selective</sup> meritocratic education, colleges are the givens and students are judged by the criteria of how well they meet the demands of the colleges.

In egalitarian education the order is reversed; students are the givens, and the educational system is judged by the criteria of how well colleges meet the needs of students.

The 1970s opened with dire warnings that colleges may have overbuilt, that a declining birthrate would induce a steady state, that standardized test scores had declined alarmingly, and that the new generation of college students could neither read nor write as well as their predecessors. Small wonder that the same Carnegie report that labeled the 1950s and 60s the Golden Age of higher education labels the 1970s Time of Troubles.

It will be easier to label the 1980s a few years hence, but it seems to me that the 1980s might well be labeled "Time of Progress" for American higher education. Troublesome as the late 1960s and 1970s were for higher education, that period of identifying problems may have been more important to the ultimate progress of education than the years of the Golden Age, during which no one was sufficiently uncomfortable with the way things were to undertake the difficult search for alternatives.

As we move into the 1980s, it is fairly clear that people, inside and outside the walls of academe, are uncomfortable with the quality of student learning. And to most laymen, the quality of student learning is directly related to the quality of teaching. Indeed it is pretty hard for anyone who thinks that

teaching makes a difference to fault student learning without also faulting teaching. But educators have not been especially self-critical about the quality of instruction.

Since most educational institutions give more attention to assessing the skills of entering than exiting students, it is easy for the educational pecking order to fault teachers just below the level of the speaker--and of course all previous levels. High schools blame elementary schools; community colleges blame high schools; four-year institutions blame community colleges; and graduate schools blame baccalaureate institutions. And then the cycle repeats itself when elementary schools blame graduate schools for not producing teachers who can solve learning problems at the elementary school level. While there is plenty of merit to the notion that education is more efficient and effective when learning skills are mastered at the earliest possible age, the fact is that there are generations of students in the pipeline who do not possess the basic tools for learning. Since it is no longer socially acceptable to weed such students out on the grounds that they are not "college material" there is a new pressure on college faculties for greater attention to the quality of teaching and learning.

The action programs that arise out of the new interest in the quality of teaching and learning seem to take two forms.

One is a broad movement across colleges throughout the nation to emphasize the importance of good teaching and to develop and recognize strong teachers. At latest count there were more than a thousand American colleges and universities that had a program or at least a set of activities related to the improvement of college instruction (Centra, 1976). These activities are new; most were established after 1970. The other effort to improve the quality of higher education is through curricular revision. Harvard has had a great deal of publicity on their proposal to remodel the general education curriculum, but many other institutions are working with less fanfare on curricular innovation.

Thus there is some evidence that the theme for higher education in the 1980s will be centered on improving the quality of education. That means that for the first time in many years, the faculties of colleges and universities will be the ones on the cutting edge of change. There are some who react to this shift by saying "High time we got around to emphasizing teaching and learning as the major business of colleges." Others warn that unfortunately the timing may be wrong. Clark Kerr (1976) has predicted somewhat glumly that "the period ahead of us now is not going to provide many opportunities for reform." He bases his conclusion on the historical fact that reform has always required growth.

The history of reform in higher education does indeed show that change occurs largely as a result of adding new people and new programs--not through changing old people or the things they do. As we move into the steady state, vital ingredients such as new money, new students, and new faculty members are missing. Since more than half of all faculty members in colleges today were hired during the expansion period of the 1960s, they will not be retiring until about the year 2000. At that time, says Kerr, we can look for a period of major reform when the change of faculty is accompanied by enrollment expansion as a result of the grandchildren of the baby boom reaching college age.

I am not that pessimistic about the opportunities for reform between now and the year 2000 for a number of reasons: First, there is now widespread national concern about the standards and quality of education. If schools and colleges are to restore public confidence, they are going to have to raise the performance of all students, but more specifically those in the lower half. Many of these students are the so-called "new students" who were brought into colleges during the access years. Unlike the traditional students who have a record of reasonable success in past learning, these new students have not experienced success in school learning, and they require a new understanding of pedagogy on the part of teachers. The research and experience related to teaching these students is having considerable spinoff

on how to improve teaching for other students as well. That spinoff is as much in attitude as in knowledge. The attitude changes are reflected in the buzz words of the 1970s-- accountability, faculty development, teacher evaluation, and the like. Moreover, there is a new emphasis on exit testing, as opposed to the entrance testing that dominates selective education.

The second reason that I think there may be significant reforms in the 1980s is that most colleges are highly motivated right now to do everything possible to attract new markets of learners and to retain current students. The most attractive, indeed maybe the only, new market for higher education consists of adult part-time learners. But it is now apparent that in order to keep that market growing, colleges will have to make some fairly major changes in curriculum, in teaching styles, and in academic procedures. There is also a new awareness that it is more cost effective to retain enrolled students than to recruit new ones. Thus I believe that there will be a constant questioning of the appropriateness of teaching styles and curricular content to the needs of students--both new and old.

Third, the greatly reduced mobility of college faculty members means that faculty will have to get ahead on their own campuses rather than through striving for national visibility. In the past, it has been largely faculty who published, got



research grants, and served on national committees who got ahead by attaining the national visibility to attract competing offers. Ambitious faculty did not spend time on teaching, student advising, and serving on local campus committees. But now many of the pipelines to national visibility are closed, or at least clogged. Research grants are hard to come by, and even if one does attain modest visibility through publications, job vacancies are few and far between. Moreover, with tenure harder to get and job security a constant threat for the untenured, some faculty may decide that their greatest security lies in loyalty and service to the local institution.

All of the reasons I have cited for predicting change are based on the cynical but realistic proposition that people are motivated to go through the hard work of change only when there is some personal payoff. Whether one looks at motivation as the desire to avoid pain or as the attainment of positive reward, it seems to me that the conditions for motivating increased attention to teaching and learning are now present.

Indeed several research reports that have come across my desk this month indicate that the trend toward increased emphasis on quality issues is already well underway. ETS has just completed a study (Wild, Fortna, and Knapp, 1978) in which they identified emerging issues in higher education through a content analysis of leading educational journals plus the writing and

speaking of those identified as the leaders of American higher education. The top priority item was a category called "curriculum and process" which included teaching and learning issues such as educational quality, grading, retention, and new programs and courses. It outranked by a significant margin even such hot issues as governmental regulation and institutional finance. As if to corroborate these findings, the latest report on independent colleges and universities (Minter and Bowen, 1978) found that senior faculty members and chief academic officers believe that the three areas in which interest seems to be increasing most rapidly on their campuses are innovative teaching methods, experiential learning programs that combine practical experience with classroom learning, and overall quality of the learning environment.

If it is true that after several decades of neglect, educators are giving top priority to issues of teaching and learning, does that necessarily mean that the 1980s will be a decade of progress? I guess my answer would be one of cautious optimism, but I am one of those perennial optimists who believe that once we put our minds and resources to solving a problem we can make considerable headway on it.

I think it is generally true that people learn what they have to know to survive. Generally speaking, community colleges know more about teaching and learning than most selective

institutions because they have had to sharpen their skills on students that are hard to teach. But one of the interesting spinoffs of the remediation movement has been the respectability generated the entire endeavor by the prestige institutions of the nation. In the Bay Area, for example, it is Stanford and Berkeley that are releasing publicity about the inadequacies of their students and what they are doing to help students learn the basic skills. Learning centers are springing up everywhere, and it is now clear that students of all levels of ability are working on basic skills and doing it in a far more accepting atmosphere than existed 10 years ago.

Now let me turn to another "current trend" that has its roots in the past and its possible full flowering in the future. This trend is threatening to college faculty, and many will reject the prediction outright. But I believe the handwriting is on the wall for some revolutionary changes in the form of college teaching. It may not change the way that the more conservative members of my generation of teachers teach, but it will almost certainly change the way our students teach.

I want to address myself to two interrelated trends which I shall call the deinstitutionalization of higher education and the increasing specialization of function of college teachers. Let us look first at the deinstitutionalization of higher education which can be illustrated by a short history of what has been happening to the physical boundaries of college campuses.

The first colleges in this country were small collegial institutions founded in small villages such as Cambridge, New Haven, Hanover, and Princeton. Students, and frequently faculty, lived on and around the campus, their physical isolation a symbol of their removal from the worldly concerns of the masses. Then came the Landgrant Movement which broke down the isolation and increased the size of the college campus. Although the landgrant institutions were still largely residential and many were still located in small towns such as Lafayette, Urbana, and East Lansing, landgrant campuses became very large, and extension services covered the state. Next came the community college movement in which campuses were generally established in the very centers of population for commuting students and faculty whose lives were rooted as much in the community as in the college. The community colleges introduced the concept of using the entire community as campus. Finally, the 21st Century with its sophisticated technology and adult student clientele is destined to move beyond local communities as campuses toward colleges-without-walls, which regard the world as their campus.

And so higher education has burst explosively from its physical boundaries, each new configuration occurring in a shorter time span than the last. It took about 150 years to move from the predominance of private colleges to landgrant universities and about 100 years from the start of the landgrant

institutions to the heyday of the community colleges. While we already know about colleges-without-walls, they probably will not emerge to full flower until around the year 2000, which is less than 25 years away. Most faculty members, however, are surprised to learn that there are already more than 200 fully accredited colleges-without-walls or extended degree programs enrolling more than 54,000 adults in associate and baccalaureate degree programs, frequently without ever requiring the physical presence of the student on campus (Sosdian, 1978).

As most of you are well aware, there is a lot of talk in higher education about lifelong learning and the coming learning society. Colleges, of course, are interested in filling the seats left vacant by the diminishing population of 18 to 24 year olds with the rapidly expanding population of 25-34 year olds. The numbers in the latter group grew more than five times as fast as the younger group during the decade of the 1970s, and the number of older part-time adults taking college level courses grew even faster than their numbers in the population. What many colleges are not aware of is the extremely rapid growth of educational alternatives for adults. In 1975, colleges and universities provided only 37% of the organized classes for part-time adult learners--a figure matched by the combination of employers, community organizations, and public school districts all providing organized classes for adults.

The competition for adult learners is heating up, and the alternatives available are becoming increasingly attractive. In the past, adult learners have not been especially interested in college credit, even though 85% of those participating in adult education today are high school graduates and as such are eligible for postsecondary academic credit. The figures are not yet in, but as I talk with people across the country, it seems to me that now that college credit is increasingly available to part-time learners, there is increasing interest in it--especially on the part of re-entry women that make up a large part of the new adult learning force. Academic credit, of course, is the one thing that colleges can offer that the competition cannot offer, but the challenge to colleges will be to offer attractive and useful courses at times and places convenient for part-time learners.

It seems to be true that whenever there is a potential new student clientele for higher education, the first accommodations are made by administrative arrangements; only later is the impact felt in college classrooms. During the push for equal opportunity for the disadvantaged, for example, the first impact was felt by the offices of admissions, financial aid, and counseling. Only recently has there been a heavy emphasis on teaching remedial students admitted under the thrust of equal opportunity. Similarly, the initial move to attract adult learners is being made by

administrative changes in the location and schedules of classes. But adults, after all, have been referred to as "volunteer learners" and the easy accessibility to instruction won't matter if the quality does not meet expectations. Thus I see the lifelong learning movement, and especially the competition for adult learners as adding to the pressures for change in college teaching.

This brings me to the final current trend that I want to talk about tonight. It has to do with the increasing specialization of the teaching function. I think it is possible, but by no means certain, that the era of the teaching generalist may be coming to an end. By teaching generalist I mean one who designs the course, prepares and presents the material, and evaluates student progress.

There is no historical trend to analyze in this prediction about the decline of the teaching generalist. As I said earlier there has been virtually no change in college instruction for centuries. But if there is no history, there is at least a parallel that I should like for you to think about.

The parallel lies in administrative structures of colleges. I am not going back to the beginning to analyze administrative change, except to make the observation that the first president of Harvard represented the ultimate in educational generalists.

He admitted students, designed the curriculum, taught, raised money, handled discipline, and in general performed the educational chores that require the attention of hundreds of specialists today.

The proliferation of administrative specialists in recent years is too well known to need any description here tonight, but the parallel to the future of the teaching generalist may need some explication.

The average teaching generalist today has special training for only one of the myriad specialized tasks that he or she is expected to perform, and that lies in the area of content specialist in an academic discipline. Most college teachers receive no training in learning theory, instructional design, evaluation of student achievement, academic counseling and advising, and a host of other specialized areas in which competence is expected. There are, however, specialists now being trained in these areas. And the demand for instructional teams is increasing. The University of Mid-America, for example, uses teams in their development of television courses. Team members are specialists in content, instructional design, technology, and evaluation.

I don't think that this means the classroom teacher is on the way out. But I do think that it means the functions of teaching are changing. There is no doubt in my mind that a very carefully prepared television lecture or demonstration delivered



to 50,000 students is a more cost-effective way to present information than 1000 classroom lectures delivered to an average of 50 students each. At the same time, I doubt that technology can ever replace the personal interaction between teacher and student and between student and student. What the new technology will do, I think, if we use it wisely, is to release human teachers to do those things that are uniquely human--to understand and respond to individual learning needs, to motivate and inspire, to serve as role models for intellectual and personal development, to counsel, etc. Those roles require college teachers who understand the life of the mind, the relationship of their academic discipline to it, and most importantly how to inspire people of all ages to their new roles as lifelong learners.

Thus I seem to end my predictions about the 1980s where I began. I think the 1980s will be a decade of progress in teaching and learning that will lead to revolutionary change in the form of teaching by the turn of the century.

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