

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION FOR THE 1980s

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The 1970s is a strange decade for American higher education. It seems to separate two vastly different moods. We look back at the 1950s and 60s and see a period of high optimism, exuberance, and self-confidence. The final report of the Carnegie Commission (1973) called these years the Golden Age of higher education. Looking ahead to the 1980s and 90s, most educators, if not downright pessimistic, are certainly not optimistic about the future. The years immediately ahead have been referred to as Time of Troubles by the Carnegie Commission. From a period of expansive growth, rapid faculty promotions, and high public confidence, higher education has moved to the problems of coping with the steady state, tenured-in faculties, the search for meaning in the curriculum, and demands for accountability from a skeptical public. It doesn't make it any easier to recognize that change occurs so rapidly now that individuals are buffeted from the Golden Age to Time of Troubles within a single professional lifetime. When change was slower, it must have been possible to raise one generation for dealing with exuberance and another for dealing with depression. But today, as your conference theme indicates, we are all expected to deal with "the challenge of change" because change is on the way.

Prepared for the 14th International Conference for Cooperative Education,
San Francisco, April 12, 1978

You have all heard the predictions about the future, and I'm sure that most of you have been either pleased or threatened by the prospect of change, depending on where you are and what you are doing. Tenured professors teaching business administration in large public universities are probably less pessimistic about the future than assistant professors teaching humanities in small liberal arts colleges. It seems to me that you who are working with cooperative education have more cause to welcome the challenge of change than those teaching in more traditional programs. Indeed, your Golden Age may yet be ahead of you, rather than behind you.

In addressing my topic "Cooperative Education for the 1980s" I would like to look at some of the trends in higher education and in the broader society to see what implications they have for cooperative education.

The longer I work as an analyst of higher education, the more convinced I become that students hold an important key to change--not usually in the role of self-conscious critics of the status quo as in the 1960s, but more commonly as the objects of society's efforts to satisfy certain national priorities. The new students flooding into community colleges in the 1950s and 60s, for example, have had a pronounced effect on college teaching. Community college teachers tend to be experimental and innovative in their teaching, not solely because community colleges have been defined as teaching institutions, but because finding more effective ways to teach a diversity of

students is a necessity, and necessity is the mother of invention. Teaching students with reading skills ranging from 4th to 16th grade levels demands a departure from the traditional classroom methods that seemed to work fairly well with selected and more homogeneous student bodies.

Higher education as a national enterprise is often accused of being non-responsive to student needs, but individual institutions and faculty members are generally quite responsive to the needs of their particular clientele. This is especially true right now, of course, when colleges are competing for students and eager to satisfy what is known, with varying shades of approval and disapproval, as consumer demand.

If then, we would seek advance knowledge of the shape of things to come in the 1980s, let us look first at the changing nature of student bodies.

There are a few institutions in the country that cast such a vivid image as to purpose or are so selective on narrow dimensions of talent that they maintain relatively homogeneous student bodies. But for most colleges the diversity of student populations will make a difference. Students today come from a wide range of the socioeconomic spectrum; they represent great diversity in academic backgrounds and expectations; and there is no longer any such thing as a "college-age" student. The youth that we still stereotype as looking like "college

students" are already a minority; over half of all students attending college classes, for credit or not, are over the age of 22. The average age of community college students is 28 and rising.

At the present time, many educators are probably overestimating the financial impact that adults will have on colleges and underestimating their impact on educational mission and instruction. It takes four or five part-time learners to make one FTE. Furthermore, while the number of adults participating in some form of organized instruction, in or out of the formal school system, continues to grow, the rate of growth has slowed somewhat in recent years. From a 21 percent rate of growth between 1969 and 1972, adult enrollments slowed to an eight percent growth rate between 1972 and 1975. This has led some analysts to conclude that the boom in adult education may already have peaked (O'Keefe, 1977). I have my doubts about that prediction for several reasons. Research is unusually consistent in showing that the more education people have, the more they want (Cross, 1978). Education is addictive and apparently insatiable. A college graduate, for example, is about four times as likely to participate in organized learning activities as a high school dropout, and the populace is becoming better educated all the time. The average adult in the United States now has more than 12 years of formal schooling and as such is a potential candidate for postsecondary education.

Not only is adult interest in education increasing, but the

opportunities for adult learning are increasing at an unprecedented rate, especially non-credit opportunities. The number of colleges offering non-credit education to adults has more than doubled since the beginning of the adult education boom, going from just over 1000 colleges in 1967 to over 2000 in 1975.

And, of course, increased opportunity stimulates interest, which in turn leads to increased participation (Willingham, 1970). Although colleges tend in this era to focus on the escalating competition for students, the fact is that what one provider of educational services does to meet desires for learning is more likely to stimulate the market for other providers than to satiate it. Witness, for example, the impact of the television program "Roots" on enrollments in college classes in anthropology and on the demand on public libraries for assistance in locating materials on local history. Another example is to be found in the recent experience of the BBC show on American Dance. The box office demand for tickets to the live performance of the Martha Graham dance troupe increased 50% after the television show. Thus there is little realistic worry that education will exhaust the learning market, even in the face of a declining population of 18 to 21 year olds. The phenomenon of formal adult learning is here to stay, and it will certainly have a major impact on the policies and procedures of higher education in the 1980s.

For one thing, it will move the center of higher education sharply toward the educational philosophy embodied in cooperative

education. John Dewey captured that philosophy in beautiful language at the turn of the century when he observed that traditional academic learning is "somewhat remote and shadowy compared with the training of attention and judgement that is acquired in having to do real things with a real motive behind and a real outcome ahead" (Dewey, 1902).

While compulsory education for young people has never really succeeded in generating the kind of motivation that Dewey was seeking, the voluntary learning of adults is characterized by "a real motive behind and a real outcome ahead." Research indicates that most adult learning is motivated primarily by the desire to solve immediate and practical problems. Adults are interested, not so much in storing knowledge for use at some future time, as in applying knowledge to life goals that seem important to them.

The great majority of adults who are engaged in independent learning projects state that their primary motivation for learning is the desire to use their knowledge directly in order to do something, produce something or decide something--in short in order to take action (Tough, 1968). Adults returning to college are going to employ much more rigorous tests of personal relevancy than today's typical 18 year old who rarely has a clear idea of either the motive behind or the outcome ahead.

At the same time that higher education moves toward the accommodation of substantial numbers of purposeful adult learners in

the 1980s, college instruction will have to offer something more than on-the-job training which is increasingly available, better than ever, cheap, convenient, and credible in the eyes of employers. In other words, cooperative education resides in that largely unexplored territory between abstract academic learning and pragmatic on-the-job training. And that would seem to be a good place to be for the mood of the 1980s.

This may be a good time to take stock of the mood of the 1980s in the broader society. Recently an interesting federal policy paper emerged from Washington demonstrating the trend toward increased separation between the three activities of life--education, work, and leisure (Best and Stern, 1976). By and large, in advanced societies, youth is spent in education, middle-age in work, and old age in enforced leisure. The increasingly pronounced separations between education, work, and leisure are due in part to the job shortage which is neither a recent nor temporary phenomenon. For the past 50 years, society has been unable to provide jobs during peacetime for everyone willing and able to work. Those in mid-life who are at their peak of political influence have reacted to the chronic job shortage by "pushing young persons back into school and older persons into ever-earlier retirement" (Best and Stern, 1976, p 6).

There seems to be growing dissatisfaction, however, on the part of almost everyone, with this solution to the problem. Sociologists are observing the rise of what has been called "rights consciousness"

or the "psychology of entitlement." Almost everyone today feels entitled to a job. At the same time, almost everyone feels entitled to education, and to full, and increasingly expensive, enjoyment of their leisure hours. Older people have insisted upon their right to work if they want to, and Congress has endorsed that right through a roll-back of mandatory retirement. Young people are showing increasing dissatisfaction with long years of uninterrupted schooling, especially when there is no guarantee of the well-paid and meaningful job to which they feel entitled at the other end of the educational pipeline. There has been a steady increase in the number of students exercising their right to a job. The labor force participation rate for students 14 to 24 years of age has climbed from 21 percent in 1948 to 35 percent today --all of which brings about the phenomenon of the part-time student, part-time worker, part-time vacationer. There is nothing very exceptional anymore about the student who goes to school full or part-time, holds a job, and takes off for what would once have been considered extravagant leisure weekends of skiing or surfing.

It is not only young people who feel entitled to the good life as a blend of work, education, and leisure. Women, dissatisfied with their unidimensional lives, are flooding into the labor market--and into education--in unprecedented numbers. While job preparation remains the top priority for women returning to college, the most rapidly growing courses in adult education are those in hobbies and recreation (PER Report, 1976). And so women too feel that they are entitled to jobs,

education, and recreation.

The examples of the new rights consciousness could be extended. Blue collar workers feel entitled, as never before, to a life beyond the factory. Labor unions are negotiating education and vacations into contracts. There is a rising desire on the part of the rank-and-file for benefits beyond mere wages--benefits that enhance the quality of life.

The point is that after a long human history of moving steadily toward a linear life plan which divides all life into three full-time phases with education for the young, work for the middle-aged, and enforced leisure for the elderly, people from all walks of life seem to be opting for a blended life plan which permits learning, work, and leisure to go on concurrently.

But even as individuals begin to make personal arrangements to move away from the linear life plan, I suppose that what we are actually moving toward is a cyclic life plan rather than a blended life plan. The term "cyclic life plan" has been used (Best and Stern, 1976) to describe a plan for dealing with the chronic job shortage which policy analysis indicates will get worse rather than better. The job squeeze is expected to become critical in the 1980s and 1990s for the baby boom generation now moving into their adult years. It is not only a question of the quantity and quality of jobs available, but of the constricted potential for advancement for those who have a foot on the first step

of the career ladder. As the unusually large generation born in the 1950s begins to push through the career pipeline, they will begin to discover that they are in fierce competition with each other for the relatively small number of leadership positions vacated by previous smaller generations. Some career pipelines will become severely congested, forcing more mid-life career changes as well as a scramble for the competitive advantage presumed to reside in further education. This is expected to fuel the lifelong learning movement with eager students well into the 1980s.

But the potential of a worsening job shortage leads policy analysts to recommend a cyclic life plan in which workers would open work and advancement opportunities to others by periodically leaving their jobs for extended periods to participate in educational or leisure-time pursuits (Best and Stern, 1976).

The implementation of a cyclic life plan would create a kind of reverse cooperative education. Instead of students leaving school periodically to gain work experience, workers would leave their jobs periodically to gain educational experience. And that reversal would have an interesting and salutary effect on educators.

Except in rare instances, cooperative education, has been a version of the cyclic life plan with work and education alternating in cycles, but rarely truly blended. As such, cooperative education programs are a giant step ahead of traditional education in moving into

a new era, but there is still much to be learned about how to blend theoretical and applied learning. All too often, the two learning experiences run on parallel tracks with no connections. The imagery of plane geometry's definition of parallel lines as lines that never meet seems all too accurate for our as yet primitive attempts to present holistic learning experiences. I suspect, however, that the presence of older students in colleges and universities will introduce a non-Euclidean version of education in which parallel lines do meet--in which work experience enriches learning and vice versa.

When cooperative education programs were largely confined to young people without previous work experience, cooperative programs may have had an impact on students, but students rarely had much impact on either the classroom or the workplace because students were the very junior members of both establishments. At school or on the job, young people are expected to observe and to learn from their elders; they are not expected to correct them. While we may think young people are not very intimidated by their elders these days, an inexperienced student fresh from the classroom can get into trouble rather quickly by telling the work supervisor about the theory of the classroom. Likewise, a 19 year old student returning from a first job experience better be a little subtle and tactful about telling the professor how irrelevant the lessons of the classroom are to the real world of work. In other words, while we hope--but do little to guarantee--that smart coop students will get it all together in

their own heads, we know that their experience is not very likely to reform either the classroom or the workplace.

A 45-year old business executive returning to the classroom, however, is a very different phenomenon. He or she has the clout to apply the learning of the classroom to the conduct of the job. Such application may well affect hundreds and even thousands of other employees. At the same time, it takes a mighty stubborn professor of banking to defy the observations of a bank executive or indeed even of a teller with five years of banking experience. Thus, despite the efforts or (or non-efforts) of cooperative educators to create a more holistic educational experience, learners with previous work experience will pressure both professors and supervisors to take cognizance of the interrelationships between classrooms and worksites. That, of course, will benefit younger as well as older students.

The influence of individual learners on both educators and employers will be further enhanced by current trends for the organizations of society to be less differentiated with respect to function. Employers are increasingly into the education business, conducting on-the-job-training, workshops for professionals, and think-tanks for executives. Altogether industry is providing instruction to some four million employees at an annual cost of some two billion dollars (Lusterman, 1977). Thus industry has become an educational provider of no small consequence, serving more than one-third as many learners as colleges and universities. Government is

another huge provider of educational services, providing instruction for nearly five million employees, counting military personnel (Peterson, et al, 1978). It is a safe bet that these agencies for whom education is a secondary purpose, are giving more attention to the interrelationships between work and learning than are traditional educational establishments.

But it is not only employers that are into the educational business these days. Possibly in response to the desires of individuals for blended life plans, travel agencies are adding educational components to packaged tours at the same time that alumni offices and university extension services are adding packaged tours to credit-bearing courses--all in the interest of blending learning and leisure.

It's hard to know anymore what is moving toward what in the universal search for the blended life plan. Although you and I may occasionally grow impatient over the separation between formal education and the real world, the long-term trends in this country have clearly been in the direction of greater interaction between colleges and the real world. That interaction, however, is far more apparent in the big picture of national trends than in the small picture of local classrooms and professors.

The expansion of the college campus illustrates the point. In the 18th Century, college campuses were small, isolated, and residential. In the 19th Century, the land-grant institutions came

into being and their campuses developed into huge, spreading complexes. The 20th Century witnessed the rise of community colleges, serving commuting populations and using the community as campus. The 21st Century with its sophisticated technology and mass media is destined to move in the direction of universities without walls and to use the world as campus. Higher education has burst explosively from its physical boundaries, but it has also extended its curricular and constituency boundaries into the broader society. Admissions offices that were once geared to screening people out are now concentrating on pulling people in, and the majority of colleges in this country must now be redesigned to serve the masses rather than an elite.

Paradoxically, while this macro-analysis pictures the outreach of education into society, a micro-analysis of the classroom and the discipline-bound professor shows little progress in making education more relevant to the lives of people. I can best illustrate the incongruity through reference to my own academic discipline of psychology. Many professors of psychology are downright disdainful of students naive enough to take psychology because they think it will be useful in living and working with people. Child psychology, for example, is not usually geared to the needs of parents wanting to understand the development of their own children; it is more likely to be taught as preparation for graduate study.

And so academics are still having trouble with the blended life

plan. While campuses and curricula have expanded into the real world, and employers and the leisure-time industry have expanded into education, professors and classrooms frequently remain aloof and untouched by the pressures for relevancy in education. My guess is that the changing nature of the student body, which is in itself a reflection of the quest for integrated rather than fragmented lives, will do much to blend schooling and learning.

The implications of this social shift are many for cooperative education, and you will know better than I how to evaluate them. But let me close by asking some summarizing questions to stimulate your anxieties about the challenge of change.

1 - If it is true that the broader society is moving toward a blended life plan, which is a basic goal of cooperative education, does that mean that cooperative education will be swallowed up, no longer represented by a small band of educational innovators?

I suppose the answer to that question is yes, if cooperative educators do not lead the way beyond offering work and classroom experiences on parallel tracks. Of the 11.5 million students studying at colleges and universities in 1977, 4.6 million or 40 percent were part-time students. Since part-time enrollments are increasing faster than full-time, it won't be long until the majority of college students have work experience. Can cooperative educators lead the way in integrating and enriching the total

learning experience for workers entering classrooms as well as for students entering employment?

2 - Theoretically, cooperative programs have considered work supervisors as "educators" of a sort, but there is a new breed of professional educator now employed by industry, community agencies, and government. How should professional educators employed by colleges relate to professional educators hired by employers?

3 - Traditional cooperative education has regarded the young person's experience of living in a new community as part of the holistic learning experience. The novelty of living independently in a new community started to erode with the appearance of commuting students; it will continue to erode with the influx of employed adults. Are there ways to help learners become more sensitive to their communities, whether new or old?

4 - The approach of the Learning Society has people talking about time-free, space-free learning. More and more people are earning college degrees without ever setting foot on a physical entity known as campus. In the three years between 1972 and 1975, the number of external degrees soared from 28 degrees in 14 states to 90 degrees in 27 states (PER Reports, August 2, 1976). What is the potential impact of the Learning Society on cooperative education?

I am sure that many other questions occur to you as you participate in this 14th annual conference of cooperative education.

Certainly there is no lack of challenge in change, and I hope that the Golden Age for cooperative education lies in the future rather than in the past.

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