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Professors as teachers: a case for faculty development

by Martha Ann Atkins

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Educators in general are becoming increasingly aware of projections for and the actuality of declining student enrollments in institutions of higher education. Faculty members in particular, faced with the tightest job market in years, sense further cutbacks in the number of available faculty positions. Moreover, the larger economic context in which higher education must operate has somewhat unsettled the "sheltered groves."

The long-held American ideal that "bigger is better" is being challenged by a relatively new disciplinary group known as futurists.[1] The idea that "small is beautiful," as put forth by E. F. Schumacher, is slowly gaining both popular and scholarly acceptance.[2] One major Democratic Presidential aspirant campaigned extensively on this theme.[3]

Educators too have picked up on Schumacher's theme, raising serious questions about the "bigness" of higher education. Berstein, in fact, went so far as to attempt developing criteria for judging when an educational institution is too big.[4]

Thinking small is not entirely a new idea, but traditionally it has been most appealing to faculty in terms of the student/teacher ratio within their own classrooms, or in some cases the number of students they must advise. It is well known, for example, that many professors prefer small graduate seminars over large introductory classes. Given, however, the present enrollment projections, educators are implored to think small in far less agreeable areas, e.g., opportunities for promotion and tenure, salary increases, time allocated for research and professional mobility.

Schumacher, as a previsor of the economic world, argues that the economic system should serve man; man should not serve the system. His subtitle, "Economics as if People Mattered," reflects this position as well as any of the contents of his book. This message could be easily adapted into an educational philosophy focusing on the educational system "as if students mattered."

Perhaps some of the problems faculty will be facing due to "smallness" could be mitigated by concentrating on the teaching of students, which is after all the major charge of an educational institution. Most Ph.D. programs concentrate on preparing graduate students for research rather than teaching endeavors, and very few graduate students are trained in the work they will actually do as teachers. Conventional academic wisdom holds that knowledge and promise of expertise in a discipline are the primary ingredients for successfully teaching students. As a result, while quality controls are exercised in the performance of research and the products produced thereby, the same critical attitude with respect to teaching activities seemingly is lacking.[5]

Lyons contends that students feel they are not being served by the educational system: "The more perceptive students see teachers less as dedicated practitioners of their disciplines than as persons whose good fortune it has been to convince the government or the trustees to underwrite their hobbies."[5] Some students not only feel underserved and boxed in by the educational system, but fatalistically sense things may get worse. Werdell argues that "the majority of students sense, quite realistically, that most of the jobs offered them upon graduation, if indeed there are jobs, offer them roles as workers no less limiting than the traditional roles of learners."[6]

If indeed these searing indictments are even somewhat typical of student attitudes, then a time of retrenchment for higher education is here. Many institutions have relied too long on external mechanisms for faculty development, e.g., allowances for travel to professional meetings, faculty exchange programs, externally funded research or project grants and high rates of faculty turnover due to an easy-access type of professional mobility. All of this is changing. More and more faculty members will be staying put. Not only will they think twice about leaving a permanent institutional position, but their travel budgets may soon decrease, and so may their external funds for special projects. Institutions wishing to revitalize their faculty may have to develop their own individual plans of action. Simply stated, some efforts at internal enrichment are necessary if making do with less is to be either acceptable or workable in the area of professional improvement and advancement.

Higher education administrators need not only to implement programs for faculty renewal, but also to devise systems of tangible rewards for faculty participation in such programs. The process for faculty renewal might include professional development, revitalization for teaching and learning, and improvement of instructional methods and skills, as well as encouraging an enthusiastic respect for the entire student/professor transaction. Tangible rewards could come either directly in the form of dollars or less directly in the form of tenure, promotion and/or release time to participate in the program.

The methods for meeting these objectives are already in use in some institutions and have met with varying degrees of success. Some problems associated with implementation of faculty development programs are resistance to new methods, the belief that only someone educated in a particular subject area can talk meaningfully about teaching it, reluctance to admit possible communication weaknesses and lack of sufficient rewards for the time invested.

For purposes of clarification an overview of some current programs for faculty renewal is essential. In the past, programs for professional development have focused on methods for increasing the individual's knowledge of his/her discipline. Support for research, travel to professional meetings and sabbatical leaves were the major ways this objective was met. However, since the primary responsibility of most faculty members is teaching students, the emphasis of faculty development currently is shifting toward programs designed to increase teaching effectiveness. L. Richard Meeth notes that "many faculty are now deeply concerned with improving their teaching effectiveness. For some this concern is the product of an institutional commitment to more meaningful instructional methods; for others, it arises from a departmental anxiety about declining interest in the discipline."[7]

Another reason for a shift in emphasis is directly related to the decline in academic career opportunities. Since opportunities for mobility are decreasing, faculty members are requesting that their institution provide the enriching experiences which promote professional development, and which might otherwise be denied them.

Jerry G. Gaff has attempted a descriptive analysis on current concepts and practices for improving teaching and learning. In the chart on the following page, he has identified three general areas for these programs of professional development.[8] Although Gaff has separated faculty development into three distinct categories, he notes that the most exciting programs have involved a combination of elements from all three areas into a comprehensive program.

> Any college or university has a great diversity of faculty members, and a comprehensive program seems more capable of meeting the diverse needs of faculty at different stages in their lives and careers and with different educational philosophies and personal styles than any more narrowly conceived program. Further, a comprehensive program is capable of making a more holistic and integrated impact on faculty than a single-purpose one. If it is important for faculty members to function effectively as individual professionals, as instructors and as organization members, then all these features need to be incorporated into a comprehensive instructional-improvement program.[9]

Although approaches to faculty development vary, the growing importance of instructional improvement is evidenced by the widespread creation of a unique kind of agency, whose primary function is to assist college faculty members improve their instruction. These agencies, centers or offices may differ in scope within their various institutions of higher education, but they share a common purpose: to contribute to the development of improved college instruction.[10]

For example, in 1970 the Office of Educational Improvement and Innovation was established at Kansas State University. Its primary purpose is to promote excellence in teaching and provide assistance to those faculty members who wish to improve their instruction. Present services offered by the office include individual consultations with faculty members concerning ways to strengthen their teaching effectiveness, group consultation to discuss evaluation of teaching and faculty performance, a college teaching course designed to help college-level teachers become more effective classroom instructors, seminars on subjects of interest to classroom teachers, a videotape service for individual classroom evaluation by the instructor, a library of books and other readings about college teaching and an evaluation system.

The evaluation system gathers, analyzes and reports on student reactions to the instructional process. It is known as the IDEA (Instructional Development and Effectiveness Assessment) system. The student rating scale provides feedback to each instuctor on his/her teaching behaviors. This office also administers a program which usually grants four monetary awards to faculty members for excellence in undergraduate teaching.[11]

Alternative conceptions of instructional improvement

	Faculty Development	Instructional Development	Organizational Development
Focus:	Faculty members	Courses or curricula	Organization
Purpose:	Promote faculty growth; help faculty members acquire knowledge, skills, sensitivities, and techniques related to teaching and learning.	Improve student learning; prepare learning materials; redesign courses; make instruction systematic.	Create effective environment for teaching and learning; improve interpersonal relationships; enhance team functioning; create policies that support effective teaching and learning.
Intellectual base:	Clinical, developmental, and social psychology; psychiatry; socialization.	Education, instructional media and technology, learning theory, systems theory.	Organizational theory, organizational change; group processes.
Typical Activities:	Seminars, workshops, teaching evaluation.	Projects to produce new learning materials or redesign courses; workshops on writing objectives, evaluating students.	Workshops for group leaders or team members, action research with work groups, task forces to revise organizational policies.

This program, as well as the majority of faculty development programs, does face at least one major problem: it has not been in use long enough to evaluate systematically its long term effect on the issues associated with faculty retrenchment. By all indications, though such programs exist in only a minority of institutions of higher education, they nevertheless represent a significant impact on the continuing adaptation of higher education to the future requirements of society. In fact, administrators need to continue to develop and legitimize future programs for faculty renewal.

It appears crucial that a system of tangible rewards also must be devised in order to insure full faculty participation. This argument rests, of course, on the assumption that participation in a program for faculty development can lead to increased teaching effectiveness. Typically, any substantial rewards allocated by four-year institutions are not distributed on the basis of teaching effectiveness. There is, however, a countervailing trend in this area which has been led by community college administrators. Still, according to Lipset:

> Regardless of what university presidents say about effective teaching (and they mean it), these institutions give off sharply contradictory signals to their faculty. If faculty look beyond the speeches to

alumni and to students and at graduation exercises, they find clear instructions in the facts reported by my former colleague: if you want salary increases, rapid promotion, or offers from other schools, devote as much of your time as you can to your research.[12]

Educators naturally do not want the economic malaise to force them to "think small" in these areas, so indeed they scramble to "publish or perish." Research is vital and necessary; disseminating research and other knowledge through scholarly publication is a worthy endeavor. These activities should be and are being rewarded. However, sharing, inspiring, leading, communicating and effectively teaching students should be equally rewarded. Actually, some steps have been taken in this direction, as evidenced by Kansas State President Duane Acker's recent memo on salary recommendations and procedures for their determination.[13] Writing to deans, directors and department heads, Acker's first suggestion was that they give good attention to "those faculty who are academic advisors and who do an especially good job of academic advising." He then suggested a look at "those who have heavy teaching responsibilities and who are good at it." **Third** was a mention of research faculty. Still, several ideas need wider acceptance before the shift toward equalizing the reward system can be completed:

1. Understanding and knowledge of a subject area do not necessarily imply the ability to convey that knowledge and understanding.

2. Teaching and research can be complimentary activities rather than competitive activities.

3. There are as many effective ways to teach and learn as there are professors and students.

Evaluation for the purpose of providing tangible rewards is a process surrounded by more questions than answers. The most important questions are evaluation by whom and with what criteria. Traditional areas of faculty development are easily quantifiable, e.g., number of publications, number of professional meetings attended and number of invited presentations. But effective teaching seems to translate into a question of quality. It is possible to subjectively recognize quality but impossible to objectively define quality. Therefore, the answers to the questions surrounding the evaluation of effective teaching remain nebulous.

The tangible rewards for participation in a program of faculty development and renewal might come in the form of salary increases and increased job security. Administrators should not attempt to evalute teaching effectiveness, but should devote their carefully conserved energy to the development of excellent programs for faculty renewal. This can be done several ways:

1. Actively seeking national resource people and project grants to enhance faculty development programs.

2. Fully utilizing the expertise already available on most campuses.

3. Facilitating the exchange of ideas about teaching and learning among the existing staff within an academic discipline.

4. Providing release time for faculty members to participate in the program.

If these four suggestions are heeded, then declining student enrollments need not be a gloomy prediction. An obvious but seldom-mentioned relationship does exist between educators and the people their institutions serve, and the economic well-being of the institution depends upon the continued support of these students, taxpayers, and donors. Educators have a unique opportunity to think small in terms of higher quality service for students and the community in which they all live.

References

1. See, for example, Barnes, Ron. "Toward Alternative Futures." Topeka, Kansas: Menninger Foundation, 1974.

2. Schumacher, E.F. **Small is Beautiful**. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

3. Nearly every campaign speech this year by Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. of California reflects the theme of "making do with less."

4. Berstein, Alison. "How Big is Too Big?" in Vermilye, Dyckman W. (ed.) **Individualizing the System: Current Issues in Higher Education.** San Francisco: Jossey-Bass,1976.

5. Lyons, Gene. "The Higher Illiteracy." **Harpers.** September 1976, p. 36.

6. Werdell, Philip. "Futurism and the Reform of Higher Education." in Toffler, Alvin (ed.) **Learning for Tomorrow.** New York: Random House, 1974, p. 302.

7. Meeth, L. Richard. "The Celebration of Effective Teaching." **Change.** February 1976, p. 44.

8. Gaff, J.G. **Toward Faculty Renewal.** San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975. p. 9.

9. Ibid., p. 99.

10. Alexander, L.T., and Yelon, S.L. **Instructional Development Agencies in Higher Education.** East Lansing: Michigan State University Continuing Education Service, 1972, p. 1.

11. "Educational Improvement and Innovation." Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University Office of Educational Improvement and Innovation, 1976.

12. Lipset, Seymour Martin. "Faculty Unions and Collegiality." **Change.** March 1975, p. 39.

13. Acker, Duane. "Memo to Deans, Directors, and Department Heads." Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University President's Office, February 4, 1976.